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New York

President: Mr. Opertti . . . . (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 9.40 p.m.

Agenda item 46 *(continued)*

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(a) Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): It seems to me that after every speaker it becomes more difficult to say something new to underline the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose fiftieth anniversary we are marking today, especially after the wonderful performance that was given by Luciano Pavarotti and Wynton Marsalis.

What could be more fundamental for people than the set of rights proclaimed by the Declaration and which many present here take for granted? Secretary-General Kofi Annan is right to say that human rights are what make us human.

History reminds us that human rights are integral elements in ensuring human dignity and in promoting peace and security, sustainable economic development and social equality. Without genuine respect of human rights, we cannot move forward as a global community.

For many States, the Declaration has become a model for elaborating national constitutional practices. The Constitution of Ukraine, adopted in 1996, is also based on the humanistic ideals of this universal document. I should like to recall that the tradition of democracy and protection of human rights has deep historical roots in Ukraine. Almost 10 centuries ago, after embracing Christianity, Prince Volodymyr abolished the death penalty. The Ukrainian Kozak Republic of the seventeenth century was one of the first democracies in Europe. In 1710, Ukrainian head of State Pylyp Orlyk wrote the first democratic constitution of Ukraine, which established a clear allocation of power and promoted personal rights and freedoms.

Since the Vienna Conference, we have seen a new, broader vision of human rights that includes social and economic rights as well as civil and political ones such as the right to education, health and development.

But as we assess what has been accomplished during the past 50 years, we cannot say that the gap has been bridged between aspirations and concrete achievements. Unfortunately, we still live in a world in which massacres of national, ethnic, racial or religious groups continue, where millions are uprooted from their homes and untold numbers are arrested arbitrarily or imprisoned without a trial. Sadly, we continue to live in a world in which torture is still practiced, in which more than a billion people live in poverty, where children are still exploited and sexually abused, the elderly neglected and women denied their fundamental human rights.

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Globalization has opened borders to new ideas and information, providing us with new opportunities to build a universal culture of human rights. Democracy has taken root in the majority of States. Conditions have been created for ensuring further progress in promoting human rights that could not have been imagined by those who drafted the Universal Declaration in 1948.

It has always been the task of the United Nations to provide a forum for diverse cultures and, at the same time, to seek the common denominator that bespeaks a common humanity. It is now our responsibility to strengthen the adherence of the international community to the principles of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, and translate them into reality.

I should like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that in September this year, a very important international Conference devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights took place in the city of Yalta in Ukraine. Organized by the Government of Ukraine and the Regional Bureau of the United Nations Development Programme, it brought together delegations from 27 States of our region. One of the major achievements of the conference was the adoption of a Plan of Action that envisages the establishment of an international network for the gathering and exchange of information on the best practices in the promotion of human rights.

Today we are completing the yearlong commemoration of the universality of human rights, but this should not mean that we have finished our work. Despite the undeniable progress made in promoting the spirit of the Universal Declaration, we, as individual United Nations Member States and as the international community as a whole, still have a long way to go to build a world in which human rights and human dignity are respected on a daily basis.

The fifty-year mark is only a point at which we are pausing briefly to measure our accomplishments in reassessing the definition and the very meaning of human rights. Human rights cannot be protected by the mere desire to do so. Our rights are not worth the paper they are printed on unless we are vigilant in protecting them.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): This fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a very memorable event indeed. The Declaration is without question the basis of the human rights activities of the United Nations, which has included human rights as a priority in its overall agenda.

Fifty years after its adoption, the Declaration constitutes international customary law and thus reflects the universal nature of all human rights. Its provisions apply to every human being worldwide. In addition, the Universal Declaration has served as the source of inspiration for developing the United Nations human rights system in that the six core human rights instruments elaborated within the United Nations all derive from the Universal Declaration. The universal ratification of those instruments must be an important goal for the international community on the occasion of this anniversary, during which we are also commemorating the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action — yet another milestone in the history of the United Nations.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I can inform the Assembly that this morning I deposited, on behalf of the Government of Liechtenstein, our instruments of accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as to the two Optional Protocols thereto. Liechtenstein wishes thus to underline today its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, within the United Nations as well as in other frameworks, which is one of the stipulated priorities of its foreign policy.

Given the overarching importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this is certainly an occasion to celebrate, but not one for self-congratulation. While we have achieved a lot in the past 50 years and created an impressive human rights regime on paper, it remains a sad fact that we are still far from achieving the key element in the area of our human rights work — their implementation in practice for the benefit of every individual in every country. The Declaration makes it clear that it is the individual that is the beneficiary of the rights contained therein. Other major human rights instruments, including the Declaration on the Right to Development, repeat and reaffirm this principle. While some of these rights can be exercised in a meaningful way only when given to collectivities, the individual remains the centre of human rights work — and it is individuals who continue to suffer worldwide from denials and violations of all human rights, sometimes committed in gross and systematic ways which reveal

State policies that utterly disregard the provisions of the Universal Declaration.

Fifty years have thus not been enough to make the Universal Declaration a reality in people's lives, and this is the challenge which we are facing today. Efforts to promote the dissemination of the Declaration are important and laudable, but implementation in practice can be achieved only if States take on their first responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights, complemented and supported by international cooperation as an essential element for achieving this purpose. The tasks ahead of us are numerous and complex, and they all require genuine political will and a true commitment to human rights from all of us.

Let me mention just two of these challenges. The Declaration established, 50 years ago, a link between human rights and international peace and security. We are thus all bound by this connection, but its translation into concrete action has been very slow indeed, and we need to increase our efforts in this regard, in particular by enhancing the preventive capacities of our Organization. We will also have to deal in a competent and responsible manner with the question of non-State actors, which is becoming increasingly important in this era of proliferation of internal conflicts which very often have particularly devastating consequences for the enjoyment of all human rights.

In conclusion, we welcome two developments which have taken place this year and constitute significant contributions to the Human Rights Year. The adoption of the Declaration on human rights defenders yesterday evening was a timely and important event, and we hope that this Declaration will contribute to eliminating the ironic fact that those who strive to secure the enjoyment of human rights — in accordance with the provisions of the Universal Declaration — are often subject to serious violations of human rights themselves. We would also like to reiterate our deep appreciation for the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court at the Diplomatic Conference in Rome. The Statute finally provides the international community with an effective means of breaking the circle of impunity and the commission of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. As a signatory to the Statute, we welcome its adoption as a landmark achievement and the most promising sign of the Human Rights Year.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish):* I now call on the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted 50 years ago, the General Assembly hailed it, in the words of the Declaration, as a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations". Today, with the benefit of hindsight, we realize that the strength of the Declaration lay in its ability to address future issues and concerns. It is a living document, and I doubt that, even 50 years on, we can improve upon what was crafted in 1948. It defines goals to which we aspire and outlines criteria by which we will be judged by future generations.

We in Bangladesh have drawn liberally on the Declaration to embody in our Constitution the fundamental rights and freedoms of our people, with special statutory provisions to ensure the rights of women, children, minorities and other vulnerable groups. As Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said in her message for today:

> "It is therefore an occasion for us to make a renewed pledge that the sacred ideals and goals set forth in the Declaration are translated into reality for every citizen of Bangladesh and to strive to secure those rights for the whole of mankind."

Since its adoption, the Declaration has inspired more than 60 international human rights instruments — an outstanding achievement by any standard. The Declaration remains today as the bedrock upon which the entire human rights regime is built. Today's anniversary provides us an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and prioritize our goals for the future.

During the last 50 years, we have witnessed that promotion and protection of human rights have an international dimension and depend a lot on the creation of a conducive international environment through effective cooperation and partnership. To ensure all human rights for all, the entire international community will have to meet the challenge together. We join others in affirming that we must all act when human rights are violated. Both States and individuals must be committed to promoting and protecting human rights.

The challenge before us assumes greater meaning against the backdrop of the approaching millennium. What should be the thrust of the United Nations to fulfil the promise of the Universal Declaration in the next century? The need for the realization of all human rights is so pressing and the consequence of delay so dire that practical and action-oriented measures should be the order of the day.

Our first priority should be the eradication of poverty. To the one out of every five persons on earth living on less than a dollar a day, today's anniversary has very little to offer. It will matter to those millions only if the right to development assumes a centrality from which all human rights flow. It is indeed the measure of our respect for all other human rights.

The second priority would be to ensure that atrocities cannot be committed, that human dignity cannot be violated with impunity. The establishment of the International Criminal Court marks great progress towards this objective. This needs to be complemented at the national level through the establishment of national human rights mechanisms that are independent and effective in dealing with violations at the domestic level.

Finally, immediate measures must be taken for the fulfilment of the rights of women and children, in particular. Vulnerability needs to be factored in while prioritizing these measures. Special efforts are required to address the needs of women in poverty, women with disabilities and female migrant workers. The needs of children, and especially those of the girl child, must be met. Women and children must be protected from violence. Unless we can do that, today's theme — "All Human Rights for All" — will remain only that — a theme and nothing more.

There is still a considerable gap between our aspirations and our achievement. Generations have struggled with dedication towards achieving the goals of the Declaration. We, too, cannot but persevere till we reach our objective. The Declaration will continue to inspire and guide us on our way.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I call upon the representative of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): The version of my statement that is being circulated in the room is almost as long as the faces of those who are receiving it, but I shall limit my intervention to the agreed five minutes.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has brought an incalculable sum of comfort, relief and dignity to people being abused or threatened. It has changed the world. While human rights abuses are reported by the media every day, this constant stream of reports is itself a tribute to the Universal Declaration and to the international human rights movement it helped spawn.

Today is a day to honour those who suffered and those who fought and made their suffering a cause. We congratulate the winners of the Human Rights Prizes this year, particularly as the presentation coincided with yesterday's adoption of the Declaration on human rights defenders.

The Universal Declaration is also a statement on the nature of man. From its opening article, it recalls the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity, and it draws sustenance from all ethical traditions. India is proud to have left an imprint on the Declaration through Hansa Mehta, one of the few women delegates involved in the drafting process.

However, the ideals of the Declaration seem to mock the frailness of our ability to give them expression. Each article has a dissident counterpoint. Article 1 calls on all human beings to "act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood", and article 2 asserts that everyone is entitled to the rights under the Declaration without distinction of any kind, including race and colour and the status of the country to which a person belongs. However, racist attitudes and practices die hard. The world has seen horrific manifestations of distinctions made on the basis of religion.

Article 3 lays down that "Everyone has the right to life", but the treatment of human rights violations that have led to or could lead to massive loss of life depends almost entirely on power equations. Articles 6 and 14, respectively, lay down for everyone the "right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law" and "to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution". The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has repeatedly drawn attention to the erosion of the right of asylum, most notably where human rights are most ardently championed. Article 9 rules against subjection to "arbitrary arrest, detention or exile". Prominent actors on the world stage appear immune to this prohibition.

Articles 12 and 19, respectively, embody protection against attacks upon one's "honour and reputation" and the right to "receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". The developing world finds itself at the receiving end but can impart very little in the global communications dispensation. The balance between diverse points of view, which is the essence of freedom, hardly exists, and is decaying very rapidly.

Closest to the aspirations of the vast mass of humanity is article 22, which speaks of the "national effort and international co-operation" through which everyone is entitled to realize the "economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality". This is where the Declaration has been found most wanting and where the greatest challenges lie. The dignity of the personality of a person is most compromised by poverty, and yet freedom from want — a fundamental right enshrined in the Declaration — has never been addressed as one of its essential underpinnings.

The universal observance of human rights will be difficult to attain in societies differentiated by gradations of affluence and want, surplus and despair. Most developing countries are in a process of change and modernization so rapid that it has become a revolution. They are struggling with the challenge of reducing in their societies the consequences of turbulence that come with revolutionary change. They need the enlightened appreciation of their more fortunate colleagues in the developed world. As Adam Smith noted, there is a dialectic between self-love and altruism. Though it is no surprise that the aggressive promotion of human rights in international forums comes from those countries that are the most self-satisfied, a larger dose of introspection and policies of meaningful assistance would be far more useful.

The stream of history cannot be segmented. The total suppression by colonialism of the fundamental human rights of peoples living in developing societies is not so distant a memory. Colonial subjugation had the abrogation of fundamental human rights as an essential precondition. The contribution of colonial arrangements to the affluence of the North is beyond computation. An enlightened approach to international cooperation cannot be based on historical restitution, but is not assisted by historical amnesia either.

The Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has argued that what was ignored in addressing the problem of famine was the acquirement problem: to avert a famine it was not enough that there should be food available; the population had to have the means to acquire the food. There is an equivalence between this and arguments on human rights. Those who claim that all that is needed is to erect a framework of laws do not address the question of how individuals acquire these rights.

My intention in making these points is not to query the value of our celebration today or cast a shadow over it. It is only to pose the conviction — and a warning, if you like — that the millennial challenge before us is to convert declarations into achievements.

Four questions appear to us to require most serious consideration. First, human rights is not just about converting the principles of the Declaration into law and implementing them. We need to create the political and economic environment in which the ideals enshrined in the Declaration could, through human agency, become a reality. At the same time, rights, by definition, have to be claimed. For that to happen people also need to know their rights. Human rights education should be strenuously promoted. In this context, we congratulate the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for today making the Declaration available on the Internet in more than 250 languages.

Secondly, how fully have we exploited the human potential of the "reason and conscience" (*article 1*) at the heart of the Declaration? We may have developed law and litigation at the expense of the ethical dimension.

Thirdly, while the principles of the Declaration evolved in the context of a certain relationship between the individual and the nation-state, the role and functions of the state are being eclipsed by the forces of globalization. How will we adapt the Universal Declaration to this new era? How can accountability be extended to market forces and actors that can undermine human rights?

Lastly, the sciences, particularly the life sciences, have made quantum leaps. For the first time, humankind has acquired the power to choose, reproduce, develop or suppress certain life forms. Suddenly Governments, research institutions, corporations and even scientists have an immense and ethically confusing power. How will we apply the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to this new era?

The universality of human rights will be truly promoted when lives everywhere are held in equal value. Whenever we react with different yardsticks, out of considerations of race, political strategy, or proximity to oneself, it constitutes a challenge to the universality of human rights and to fraternity and brotherhood. Let us use this occasion to engage in serious introspection about how we can achieve the promise of the Universal

Declaration. Let us not only lament what we have not fulfilled, but examine the reasons for our failures.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the formulation of which Egypt actively participated, represents a true product of the interaction of diverse cultures and civilizations and a major turning point in the history of humanity. It has become the philosophical basis and practical guide for the activities of the United Nations in the field of human rights, including the formulation and implementation of mandatory international legal instruments. The Declaration has changed the international conception of human rights to the point that these issues are no longer abstract ideas that are of interest only to those working in the field. The Universal Declaration has succeeded in projecting human rights issues as broad and multifaceted questions for everybody, *erga omnes*, and has become a reality that is dear to our hearts and present in our minds.

Today, half a century after its adoption, we must assess the extent to which the international community has committed itself to the contents of the Declaration, and what is required in the future in order to promote respect for human rights in general. A detailed examination of the respect shown for human rights in the contemporary world shows that such respect does not rise up to the expectations that prevailed when the Declaration was adopted.

We must acknowledge that the situation is not as positive as the founders expected it to be. It does meet the expectations of the international community at the threshold of the third millennium. It is true that some concrete progress has been achieved in many important areas, such as guaranteeing fundamental rights, the elimination of slavery, the prohibition of genocide, the elimination of racial discrimination and apartheid, the improvement of the conditions of refugees and the promotion of the rights of women and children and, finally, the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which will try crimes against the security and safety of humanity. However, in other important areas there has not been tangible progress; indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in such areas human rights have suffered a setback.

Cultural, economic and social rights, particularly the right to development, have become subject to discrimination and have not been accorded the same importance as civil and political rights. Even those political and civil rights that have been the focus of interest for so long are now subject to serious violations, the most glaring example of which we are witnessing in the occupied Arab territories: the worst kind of occupation and dispersal and the denial of legitimate rights.

I also wish to refer to another very serious phenomenon in the international community: double standards. We see in certain cases that the standards of international legitimacy within the field of human rights are very strictly observed, while in other situations, which are no less serious or urgent, they are not. This double standard should be avoided as the next century begins.

Globalization, which has made the world an interrelated village, presupposes that international relations will be conducted on the same basis as relations that are conducted internally within societies, since democracy is part of a whole, and can be achieved only if soundly applied internally and internationally. The international community needs to crystallize a new vision, agreed to by all, that is commensurate with the requirements of our age. The protection of human rights in a converging world should be seen only from the point of view of international cooperation and within its framework. International cooperation should take into account the diversity and particularities of cultures, and in this context, we realize the importance of the Universal Declaration and its related documents, inspired by revealed religions. We believe that objective dialogue and genuine partnership between Governments and the components of the international community are important. Human rights, like all legal rules, are formulated in response to societal needs. Although the requirement of one society may vary from those of another, we have to tolerably accept these differences and to build upon them an integrated edifice for the protection of human rights everywhere.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most important items on the agenda of the General Assembly at its current session. Today, the international community has an opportunity not only to reconfirm the historical and practical significance of this document, the adoption of which is rightly considered to be one of the outstanding achievements of the United Nations, but also to confirm that human rights issues are at the top of the current United Nations agenda, to analyse the successes and failures of the past and to view the prospects and set the goals for the future.

Our delegation would like to reconfirm here our country's steadfast adherence to the letter and the spirit of the Universal Declaration — a unique document that laid the foundation of the contemporary understanding of human rights and freedoms. Our country is attached to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, and is a party to the most important international treaties in the field of the promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms. Rights proclaimed in the Declaration and reinforced in international covenants and conventions have become part of the Constitution and national legislation of Belarus.

The fundamental position of Belarus in the field of human rights is that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that their protection remains the important duty of the State. We proceed from the understanding that democracy, as a political model, is one of the basic conditions for the full realization of human rights. Human beings and their rights and freedoms are the highest values and objectives of society and the State. Belarus is building a democratic society based on the supremacy of law, political pluralism and respect for human rights.

We are convinced that only constructive and straightforward dialogue, free from selectivity and double standards, close cooperation and a global approach to human rights on a fair and equal footing can contribute in practice to the improvement of human rights situations in any region of the world.

Belarus attaches great importance to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A national committee for the commemoration of this important day has been established and a programme of appropriate events, based on educational activities, has been approved. The text of the Universal Declaration was printed today in all the national newspapers.

The parliamentary hearings on human rights were a very important event in public life in Belarus in 1998. They provided an opportunity to examine the main problems and priorities in this field and to define the tasks to be dealt with by all branches of government and elements of civil society.

The Government of Belarus also attaches great significance to the development of international cooperation in the field of human rights. It is symbolic that the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration is the year in which the Parliament of Belarus ratified the Commonwealth of Independent States convention on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Belarus actively cooperates on human rights issues with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is an effective mechanism for regional cooperation. Mutual obligations on promoting and protecting human rights are included in a number of bilateral treaties to which our country is a party.

The Government of Belarus attaches great importance to cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme in the framework of a technical assistance programme aimed at strengthening the potential of human rights activities and infrastructures in the human rights field.

All human rights for all: that theme of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is, indeed, the broadest definition of one of the most important tasks faced by the United Nations, by every State and by every person. Belarus is ready to make maximum efforts at the national level as well as in close cooperation with other States and international organizations for its implementation.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Guyana to make a statement on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): In the aftermath of the Second World War, the peoples of the world determined that they would tolerate no more man's cruel inhumanity to man. Accordingly, when their representatives met in San Francisco to create the United Nations, they resolved, in the Charter,

> "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights,
> in the dignity and worth of the human person,
> in the equal rights of men and women".

Evidently, they believed that such a reaffirmation would serve to enhance their peace and security and at the same time promote their economic and social development.

Although not present at the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the 14 countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), on whose behalf I have the honour to speak, did not hesitate to subscribe to the Charter immediately upon their independence. They readily and fully embraced the purposes and principles embodied therein. Not surprisingly, their Constitutions and, indeed, all their governmental structures sought to incorporate full respect for and observance of the rights and freedoms of their people. At the international level, they have hastened to accede to all major conventions and treaties which seek to ensure the full enjoyment and exercise of these rights.

With the adoption 50 years ago of the Declaration of Human Rights, the international community made a major step towards fulfilling the provisions of the Charter. A great deal has been accomplished by way of promoting and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms.

Yet, despite such achievements, we cannot forget that for millions of people all over the world, the principles of the Universal Declaration remain an unfulfilled aspiration. The open civil conflicts which prevail in several countries of the world have resulted in egregious and systematic human rights violations and in serious threats to regional peace and development. Massive movements of refugee populations displaced as a result of these wars have created new humanitarian and human rights problems of unprecedented dimensions. The plight of women and children, particularly in situations of armed conflict, is now an issue of serious concern for the international community. The United Nations can and must do more to halt these horrendous abuses.

At the same time, the grave economic and social disparities which continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor countries effectively withhold the basic rights of food, shelter, health care and work from millions of people. One consequence of this tragedy is that every day some 34,000 children under the age of five die as a result of malnutrition or preventable diseases. Moreover, as the United Nations Children's Fund tells us, in this year's *State of the World's Children* report, 130 million children of primary school age in developing countries, including 73 million girls, are growing up without basic education. With the denial of this essential right, yet another generation will be lost to poverty and underdevelopment.

Fully cognizant of the threat which widespread extreme poverty represents for the effective enjoyment of human rights, CARICOM Governments have invariably sought to attain a decent standard of living for their people. However, the burden of a huge external debt, dwindling resources and marginalization of our economies have forced many Governments to make hard choices, often resulting in harsher conditions for the poor. The United Nations, and more particularly the international financial institutions, must be more attentive to the negative impact which this economic and social deterioration has on the lives of ordinary people. To eradicate poverty, undoubtedly the single most important obstacle to the full implementation of human rights, there must be general recognition of the right to development as an intrinsic component of economic, social and cultural rights. Effective action must be taken so that developing countries can reach their economic goals through the establishment of a more just and equitable international economic order. A determined effort must be made to achieve the aim of halving global poverty by the year 2015. Only by so doing can we hope to realize the promise of betterment which the new millennium holds for all peoples.

CARICOM member States also take the view that human rights can thrive only in a democratic environment. We are therefore committed to people-centred development through which our citizens can be educated about their rights as well as their obligations. We do not believe, as many seem to argue, that there are inherent and inevitable tensions or conflicts between the rights of people and the rights of States. In a democracy, both the people and the State must cooperate to ensure the creation of conditions in which human rights can flourish. There is therefore in the Caribbean an ongoing dialogue between democratically elected Governments and their social partners on how best they can work to that end.

As States which believe that rule of law is essential to full respect for human rights, CARICOM countries welcome the establishment of the International Criminal Court as a necessary adjunct to the Universal Declaration. This Court can offer reliable legal machinery for the protection of human rights throughout the world. Similarly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has an important role to play in developing greater awareness of human rights obligations. We therefore look forward to the development of these two institutions so that they can be properly equipped to discharge the responsibilities entrusted to them. For their part, in an effort to enhance their own protection at the regional level, CARICOM countries have moved closer to the creation of a Caribbean court of justice to provide a common forum of appeal for our citizens.

Let me, in conclusion, assure the Assembly that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains as relevant and important to the Caribbean countries as it was at the time it was adopted. Its principles continue to provide all Governments with a yardstick by which they may measure their effectiveness in serving the best interests of their peoples. On occasion we may be found wanting in some areas, and we will need to do more to reach the universal goal of responsibility. The fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, coming as it does at a psychologically significant moment close to the dawn of the third millennium, offers us all an opportunity to again place human rights high on the list of our international and national agendas. Our CARICOM countries will certainly not fail to seize the occasion to do so.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Hosani (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Our commemoration today of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a critical recommitment by the international community to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms so as to make the enjoyment of human rights a reality for every inhabitant on this planet.

In spite of our forward-looking vision of the nature of the international work in this field, which we all expressed in the 1993 Vienna Programme of Action, and although this vision formed the institutional framework for any comprehensive objective assessment of the mechanisms and efforts for the balanced and fair protection of universal human rights, which are indivisible and inalienable, we still feel deep anxiety about the continuation of the blatant violations of human rights in several regions of the world, especially those areas still plagued by internal conflicts and regional divisions. These divisions have taken the form of growing violence, genocide and ethnic cleansing, and they accentuate the problems of war refugees.

The supremacy of law is a vital element in the containment of conflicts and the protection of civil, cultural, social, political and economic rights; but it is also a prerequisite for sustainable development and stability. Therefore, we feel it important to support the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which should be coordinated with the other activities of the United Nations in peacekeeping and in the promotion of economic and other rights.

We in the United Arab Emirates — a State that has striven since its inception to uphold respect for human rights and commitment to the laws governing these rights, in accordance with the tolerant Islamic religion's concept of man as the noblest of creations, for whom God created all that is in heaven and on earth — we would like to affirm our rejection of double standards in matters of human rights and interference in domestic affairs, especially when these rights are exploited in the service of narrow political objectives relevant to the interests of some States. We also support the right of peoples to self-determination as an integral part of humanitarian international law. Our support goes also to those peoples under colonial domination in their just struggle against all forms of occupation practices.

We also realize the importance of supporting international humanitarian efforts for the supremacy of human rights on the basis of the Charter and the various obligations provided for in international instruments on human rights, while taking into consideration the particularities of each society, its history, heritage and national interests. In so doing, we reaffirm the importance of the international community's adoption of a comprehensive, coordinated approach consisting of plans and strategies aimed at dealing with the basic causes of violations of human rights, especially those that compromise human dignity — including famine, poverty, disease, backwardness and violence — so as to guarantee justice and development for all of humankind.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of El Salvador.

Mr. Castaneda-Cornejo (El Salvador) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Today the international community is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most important events of this century — the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On 10 December 1948, as the international community was beginning to put behind it the horrors of the Second World War — the destruction and loss of millions of lives that marked the existence of several generations — it restated the vision that human beings had of themselves and their milieu and of the responsibilities that States should shoulder to defend human dignity. Fifty years later, all States, peoples and nations that we represent and belong to accept the universality and validity of the rights recognized in that far-reaching Declaration, which is a Magna Carta for the whole of humankind.

In the context of this commemoration, it is relevant to recognize that the current concept of human rights is based on overcoming obstacles that impeded the universal recognition of human dignity, the acceptance of the diversity and plurality of human beings and peoples, the broadening and enrichment of the collective conscience by disseminating and implementing principles based on tolerance, freedom, democracy, cooperation, solidarity and peace. We must also state that much of the progress achieved is owed to people who have given their lives to create a more just and humane world — heroes to whom we pay a well-deserved tribute.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, based on the intrinsic dignity of every man and woman, marks the beginning of a process unprecedented in the history of humankind — the recognition and acceptance of a set of rules and guarantees inherent in the human condition and in the creation of a universal system to protect and promote human rights. The Universal Declaration, the consolidation of human rights and their inclusion in national and international agendas are, to our mind, the most important historical legacy of the twentieth century. This legacy, the result of half a century's work, is unfortunately also marked by a past of violence and intolerance. Many of our countries have seen the emergence of democracy and the establishment of rule of law after painful crises and irreparable loss of human life. The path for countries such as El Salvador has not been an easy one, but our difficult experience has served the promotion and defence of the common cause of human rights, through efforts both collective and individual.

In recent history, the international community has also witnessed atrocities that have shaken the conscience of nations. We have seen the emergence of the spectre of genocide and intolerance, just when we were experiencing the enthusiasm of a new era of hope. These events and the new world situation should lead us to think about what values the international community should strengthen in dealing with human rights as a part of the United Nations agenda — values that would prevent confrontation and politicization, focus upon cooperation and international solidarity and champion respect for and the defence of human rights, wherever they might be violated.

Humankind had to wait until the middle of the twentieth century for the emergence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Fifty years later, the evolution of its principles and tenets and the emergence of international human rights law as one of the fastest-changing branches of law have led to the creation and adoption of a set of instruments and mechanisms for monitoring, promoting and protecting human rights at the international, regional and national levels.

The International Bill of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Declaration on the Right to Development and other instruments on human rights provide the necessary framework and indispensable tools for striking a proper balance and moving into the next millennium with renewed hope.

Now is the time to make a reality of the principles and aspirations that inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The commemoration of its anniversary should set the guidelines for revitalizing the political and moral commitment our Governments have made to making progress in this direction. As indicated in the annual report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the progress of nations, a day will come when the progress of nations will be measured not by their military or economic power, or by the splendour of their capitals and their public buildings, but rather by the well-being of their peoples, by their levels of health, nutrition and education, by their opportunities to receive proper remuneration for their work, by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, by respect for their civil and political liberties, by care given to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged and by the protection given to the physical and mental development of their sons and daughters.

This individual and collective effort that we, the peoples of the United Nations, make will be a successful and effective contribution to the arrival of that day of hope and to the creation of a real culture of peace, which is essential to ensuring universal respect for human rights.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): As we approach the new millennium, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emerges as a guiding beacon for conduct by countries and people in the sacred cause of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration represents the common realization of the peoples of this planet that human rights are paramount, indivisible and universal. It is a yardstick that takes into account the diversity of our world, creating a common denominator that transcends civilizations, cultures and belief systems.

I take this opportunity to join the Secretary-General in paying tribute to those dedicated people whose relentless efforts produced this landmark document. I also bow my head in respectful memory to the countless victims of human rights abuses.

The Universal Declaration established the principle that the protection of human rights is a matter of legitimate international concern. It consolidated the efforts of the international community to create a comprehensive system whose objective is the safeguarding of the values that inspired the founding fathers of the United Nations: freedom, justice and peace in the world. Since 1948, numerous international and regional human rights instruments have been adopted, and tremendous progress has been made towards the achievement of the Declaration's noble aims. The proliferation of human rights instruments and the impressive achievements in mainstreaming human rights in all societies testify to that.

We note with satisfaction that the protection of individual human rights and freedoms has developed in parallel with the progressive development of international law. We are encouraged by the denunciation of the use of force in international relations and the rejection of the occupation of territories and their annexation by the occupying Power. We also welcome the increasing insistence of the international community on the right of refugees to return to their homes in full enjoyment of their right to property.

Over the last 50 years, our world has witnessed tremendous changes, from the confrontation of the cold war with its spectre of nuclear annihilation and intense clash of ideologies to a world where new alliances are being shaped, fuelled by the need for economic development in an increasingly interdependent and highly competitive international environment. The new conflicts have demonstrated that we have a long way to go to fully realize the aims of the Declaration. Intolerance, whether religious or ethnic, has manifested itself in new forms with gross violations of human rights of a kind that we had hoped would remain buried in the past. These conflicts — fully utilizing the psychology of terror on the civilian population, with the abhorrent phenomenon of "ethnic cleansing" preeminent among the elements of this terror — have presented new challenges to the international community in its efforts to create the conditions for achieving the aim of a better world for all.

In this respect, we welcome the development of international legal instruments whose objective is to enforce humanitarian law and to prosecute violators of human rights. We reiterate our support for the speedy establishment of the International Criminal Court and for efforts to reinforce human rights mechanisms.

As President Clerides has stated, Cyprus regards this anniversary as particularly significant since the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of its people continue to be subjected to gross and ruthless violations resulting from the Turkish invasion and from the continuing forcible division of our country in flagrant violation of United Nations principles and resolutions.

As a Member State fully committed to the ideals upon which this Organization was founded and to the aims of the Universal Declaration, Cyprus seizes upon this joyous celebration to reaffirm its staunch commitment to the cause of human rights and to securing the Declaration's objectives. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our conviction that respect for the rule of law and human rights for all people, regardless of race, religion, language or gender, remain the solid foundation for harmonious relations among States.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the representative of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): On this auspicious day of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Kazakhstan reaffirms its commitment to the spirit and the letter of that historic instrument. The significance of the Declaration is hard to overestimate. It has become the fundamental document of the twentieth century in the sphere of human rights. The provisions of the Universal Declaration have been incorporated into the constitutions of many States of the world, including independent Kazakhstan, and have influenced the subsequent development of international law.

The contribution of the United Nations to the implementation of the principles of the Universal Declaration is truly significant. The integration of human rights issues into all aspects of United Nations activity translates the implementation of those rights to the practical level. In this context, Kazakhstan notes with satisfaction and gratitude the active and purposeful work of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson.

The significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the assertion of democratic values and the rule of law is not something transient. In his congratulatory message addressed to the Secretary-General on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nursultan Nazarbaev, emphasized that this is of special importance for the newly independent States that have embarked on the course of democratic development, including Kazakhstan.

It is indisputable that the road to mature democracy, which many States have taken centuries to travel, is a long and difficult one. In those countries where democracy already existed and at certain historical stages — for example, after the Second World War — was suppressed, its revival was not such a difficult matter. But in Kazakhstan, where democratic institutions in the modern sense did not exist, this process began virtually from scratch. Seven years ago, having set out on the road to democracy, Kazakhstan began to make considerable efforts to carry out political reforms whose ultimate aim is to ensure the rights and freedoms of each citizen of our multiethnic republic; we continue those efforts today. These rights are fully embodied in the Constitution, which reflects international standards in the sphere of human rights.

Recently, the President of Kazakhstan initiated new steps for the intensification of the democratic transformation in such important spheres as elections, political parties, parliament, civil society, the judicial system and the mass media. The raising of democracy to the level of State policy is a significant new step in the establishment of a civil society. It is noteworthy that these steps have been reinforced by Kazakhstan's accession this year to a further four United Nations conventions in the field of human rights. Currently, Kazakhstan is a party to 18 multilateral international treaties regulating various aspects of human-rights-protection activities. With the development of our country's political and socio-economic potential, the issue of Kazakhstan's accession to the International Covenants on human rights is also becoming topical, and we are beginning that process.

All of these measures, in the context of the political reforms that are under way, are aimed at further protecting and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of every citizen of our multiethnic society, which consists of representatives of more than 100 ethnic groups. We shall do everything possible to preserve such values as inter-ethnic harmony and the multiplicity of cultures and customs of the various ethnic groups making up the people of Kazakhstan. We shall strengthen pluralism in society for the purpose of reliably guaranteeing freedom of conscience, speech and the press, and of further strengthening the foundations of a secular democratic society based on tolerance and mutual respect.

A logical step to strengthen international cooperation was the signing in December this year of the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the opening of an OSCE centre in Almaty, which is to take place early in 1999. Another important bilateral document signed recently was the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Kazakhstan and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on the expansion of cooperation in the field of human rights.

We are convinced that this cooperation will make an important contribution to the legal development of our State, which is aligning its actions with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As we commemorate Human Rights Day together with the world community, Kazakhstan will continue to extend the necessary support to the noble activity of the United Nations in the implementation of the lofty principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Pappalardo (Paraguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At today's meeting, the United Nations is commemorating the important occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most important international instruments in history — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — which establishes a common standard for the progress of all peoples and nations and which has been and continues to be a source of inspiration and a basis for progress in the sphere of human rights.

Fifty years ago, in the city that was the cradle of the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity, 58 States Members of the Organization, including Paraguay, expressed their shared ideals and thoughts about fundamental human rights. This Magna Carta for all humanity, as it has been rightly called, represented a milestone in the long struggle for human rights.

Fifty years ago in Paris, my delegation called the Declaration a beam of light in the history of mankind. Since then, that light has inspired the defence and promotion of the rights of individuals and peoples, enshrining them in the legislation of each country and its constitution, as it has in Paraguay.

At the national level, we can assert that much progress has been made since February 1989, when Paraguay regained democracy, the proclamation of which was based on the onset of democratization and respect for human rights. Thus, securing democracy and preparing the groundwork for the full enjoyment of human rights became the keystones of the transition process and the consolidation of democracy.

The Republic of Paraguay has acceded to and ratified most instruments on the promotion, defence and protection of human rights, both in the United Nations and in the Organization of American States. Among these are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the almost universal Convention on the Rights of the Child. To this, we might add our recognition of the jurisdictions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 1993 and of the International Court of Justice in 1996. Moreover, recently in Rome, Italy, we signed the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court.

We welcome yesterday's adoption by the Assembly of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, otherwise known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. We pay tribute to all those individuals and organizations that, throughout these years, have committed themselves to promoting and protecting human rights. I also wish to emphasize the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We reiterate here my country's support for and commitment to the work of Mrs. Mary Robinson, whose burden is very heavy.

As part of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, the Government of the Republic of Paraguay has included the subject of human rights on our country's school curriculums and has incorporated it into the educational reform being undertaken by the Government to ensure a culture of respect for the dignity of the human person and to educate in truth with honesty. In tribute, we have decided to assign the honorific "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" to this year's graduating class from educational institutions, state and private, at various levels of education in our country.

I also wish to recall that the delegation of Ecuador, in its statement in Paris in 1948, indicated that the best way to determine whether the Declaration was incomplete or unsatisfactory was undoubtedly to allow time to pass and to judge it later, according to the results it had achieved.

Half a century later, we can rightly say that the achievements have been many. A large number of potential victims of violations and vulnerable groups have come under the protection of laws adopted in this respect. Apartheid belongs to the past. Awareness of the need to respect democracy and the rule of law has never been as widespread as it is today.

We know, however, that, despite these achievements, human rights violations continue to take place at an alarming rate. The world continues everywhere, in North and South alike, to witness discrimination, summary execution, torture and the denial of fundamental rights. Sadly, pain and violence, armed conflict, disease, illiteracy and poverty are common today. In many parts of the world, women and children continue to fall victim to countless acts of abuse, injustice and discrimination. Children are exploited and victimized in armed conflicts.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the road ahead is long and the challenge great. The most pressing task before us today with respect to human rights is the practical implementation of agreed norms. This obligation falls mainly to national Governments, civil society and the international community.

On 10 December 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, the delegation of Paraguay expressed its unstinting support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which expresses mankind's real *raison d'être*.

Today, on 10 December 1998, Paraguay reaffirms this belief and reiterates its commitment to redoubling its efforts to promote understanding of and respect for the rights enshrined in the Declaration and other international instruments and declarations adopted later. We pledge to continue to work to make the slogan "All human rights for all" a reality for present and future generations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Pérez-Otermin (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Today, we commemorate 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Uruguay joins in the celebration with great fervour, clear conviction and determination to pursue the road towards achieving the goals that have been set.

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly, at its third session in Paris, proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by 48 votes in favour to none, with eight abstentions. Thus, three years after the signing in San Francisco of the constituent Charter of the United Nations on 26 June 1945, a necessary stipulation of Article I was complied with:

> "[P]romoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

From that day to this, a series of treaties, agreements and resolutions of various bodies of the international community have been adopted, creating an entire system for developing an effective mechanism to prevent violations of essential human rights. The latest such text, recently adopted in Rome and for which our country voted in favour, created the International Criminal Court. Once it has begun its work, the Court will be one of the most important instruments for preventing human rights violations and punishing their perpetrators. Uruguay is part of this whole mechanism at both the international and regional levels. It has ratified or adhered to the various international and regional agreements and has voted in favour of resolutions and decisions in these spheres.

It therefore seems that after legislating on this issue at the international level for 50 years, the framework and instruments necessary for the promulgation, definition and defence of human rights have been established and that the time is ripe for reflection. Accordingly, we must ask ourselves where we should focus our future action in order to achieve the desired goal of not seeing new violations of human rights in the world on a daily basis.

Humanity has made much progress in the defence of human rights in the course of the last 50 years, but we must also accept the fact that much yet remains to be done. We therefore believe that this is the appropriate juncture and opportunity to pause for reflection in order to find an answer regarding our future action. In this regard, we believe that there is no better course of action than to return to our foundations — to our roots — as clearly expressed in the purposes and principles of our Organization, which remain fully valid. We believe that they provide the indissoluble relationship that exists and should exist between human rights and the maintenance of peace, between human rights and development, and between human rights and education — all within the framework of the full exercise of a democratic system of government.

The maintenance of peace is the first purpose set forth in the Charter of the United Nations. This purpose thus became the foundation upon which the rest of the Charter's objectives were to be constructed. Without peace there cannot be development or free exercise and observance of basic rights. Like peace between States, peace within States — internal order — is also necessary, for without it undertaking any government action to advance these purposes will also not be possible. This is why the maintenance of peace, both internationally and domestically, is a priority of my country's international and domestic policy and why we have supported all along all the United Nations resolutions aimed at that goal, particularly all those that promote general and complete disarmament.

However, it will be very difficult to maintain peace without a minimum degree of development that brings about the well-being of populations. In this connection, international cooperation, which is another of the purposes of the Charter, is therefore vital and should be aimed essentially at those States whose domestic policy priorities include genuine distribution of wealth among their inhabitants. We do not think that it contributes to the maintenance of domestic internal order to foster rich States with poor populations.

We also believe that there cannot be genuine and effective development or realization of human rights without a well-defined educational policy. We are referring not only to education and dissemination of information on human rights in particular, but to education in general. Human rights can be propagated if society has a minimum degree of ability to learn. Our efforts should therefore be aimed at achieving levels of general education among populations so that they can understand the meaning and force of human rights. It should be up to citizens themselves to defend their own essential rights. Education should begin in the family itself, which should teach and give an example to children so that they can enter society with a minimum level of instruction with regard to respect and mutual tolerance vis-à-vis their peers.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that there can be no full exercise of human rights if peace, development and education are not part of a democratic system of government. Without democracy there will be no peace, development with justice, free education or full exercise of human rights. We are talking about genuine democracy and a system of government in which there is a clear separation of powers — the legislative, executive and judicial. We are referring to a State where the functions of its leaders are limited by the rights that are freely legislated by its own citizens. We are referring to a system of government in which political parties have been established spontaneously and freely by citizens. Without political parties there can be no democracy. They are and should continue to be the conduits of public opinion and the legitimate representatives through which public opinion is expressed.

In the final analysis, we understand that future action should be focused on the quest for and defence of the values that are essential to and inseparable from the full observance and exercise of human rights: peace, democracy, development and education. All of this should proceed in accordance with the principles spelt out in the Charter: the sovereign equality of all Members, good faith in the fulfilment of commitments undertaken, the peaceful settlement of disputes, abstention from the use and threat of use of force and respect for non-intervention in affairs that are essentially within the internal jurisdiction of States.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Najem (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me to begin by recalling that Lebanon played a role in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, whose fiftieth anniversary we are commemorating today. I also have the pleasure to affirm that the Constitution, laws and political system of Lebanon enshrine human rights and citizens' rights as recognized in our contemporary world. Lebanon's system has adopted political pluralism, just as it fully respects the freedom of the press and the right of the individual to express his opinion. Lebanon organizes democratic elections for all its constitutional institutions, including the Parliament, the presidency of the Republic and the administrative councils.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a response to the tragic suffering of millions of human beings throughout history. It is a document whose purpose is to protect the dignity and basic rights of human beings. The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers us an opportunity to evaluate humankind's commitment to the rules and basic principles agreed by Governments and States with a view to eliminating injustice and repression.

However, 50 years after the 1948 adoption of that Declaration, human rights violations continue to take place throughout the world in the form of racist practices including, first and foremost, policies of "ethnic cleansing" and collective displacement, whatever their origins may be; occupation; detention; the expulsion of peoples from their homes; the taking of hostages; the imposition of sieges; and the creation of settlements, which deprive people of their fundamental rights. The only language used by the occupier is one of massacre, expulsion, oppression and suppression of freedom, thought and expression.

The world also continues to distinguish between basic human rights and freedoms in the political, social, economic and cultural fields. Although the overall situation is gloomy because of the instances of poverty, hunger and oppression, particularly in the southern hemisphere, which is a serious offence to human dignity, the charters and international conventions elaborated during this period to deal with human rights reflect considerable intellectual, juridical and political achievements. The ultimate objective of our sustained efforts must be to muster political will and strengthen legal instruments in order to implement internationally agreed principles and agreements in the service of human rights and human dignity.

Legislators, intellectuals, diplomats, politicians and statesmen have endeavoured to elaborate an international legal framework on human rights, and hence we have seen the promulgation of international, national and regional agreements codifying human rights, with the goal of ensuring respect for and compliance with them.

Humankind aspires to ensure that in future the concept of human rights becomes an integral part of political decision-making at the local, regional and international levels. This will lead to qualitative changes, not only in the way various types of national, regional and international institutions work, but also will have a direct effect on international relations and their underlying philosophy.

The world is moving towards the uniformization of the criteria, instruments and objectives involved in bringing about the ultimate manifestation of mankind's humanity and allowing the individual to flourish. We should in the near future realize humankind's right to development, a goal whose achievement some are still impeding. What is needed here is an international consensus in addition to the other rights that have already been approved and adopted. Joint efforts to eliminate human rights violations, wherever they arise, involve collective responsibility on the part of States, Governments and civil society. We look forward to an integrated effort which would consolidate respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the years and decades to come.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*interpretation from French*): I should like to state at the outset that I am speaking on behalf of the members of the Organization of African Unity.

Fifty years have elapsed since men and women of goodwill, traumatized by the horrors of war and determined to prevent such atrocities from happening again, adopted in Paris — the homeland of liberty as envisioned by the revolutionaries of 1789 — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The great originality of that Declaration is that, though it does not have the legally binding nature of a convention *stricto sensu*, it has gradually gained strength because of its relevance and its humanistic ambition — despite the fact that immediately following its adoption it seemed to be but a high-minded wish list. Tribute must be paid to the United Nations, the broad range of associations and organizations and the people of every stripe who have fought to translate respect for human rights into reality. While the two conventions that accompany the Declaration — the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — have not been fully implemented, awareness has nonetheless grown to such an extent that, in the case of Africa, for instance, almost all basic legislation refers to them.

Legal mechanisms geared to safeguarding human rights are gaining strength. An example is the establishment of penal tribunals such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which hear cases that involve crimes against human dignity. The most recent achievement in this area was clearly the establishment of the International Criminal Court, whose work will have a decisive impact on respect for human rights.

Africa, as history has so clearly shown, is the continent that has suffered the most from human rights violations. Slavery and the abasement, humiliation and inhuman treatment it inflicted relegated black people to a subhuman level. Colonization, which the administering Powers attempted to disguise as a civilizing mission, revealed its true nature through regimes under which colonized peoples could be moulded and subjugated at will.

Africa has also had the bitter experience of intolerance and racism, the culmination of which was surely the scourge of apartheid, whose official abolition does not mean that it has been totally eradicated. Let us take care: slaveholders, racial supremacists and modern-day slave traders are still among us, conjuring up the spectre of immigration or expounding on the evils of multiracial coexistence.

It is understandable, therefore, that Africa should be deeply concerned first and foremost with human rights, not only because it can serve as an example in this area but because, having experienced the most degrading conditions possible for human beings, it is determined to champion respect for human rights. This has led to the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and more recently of the African court on human rights, as well as to various national human rights movements throughout the continent. But human rights also means respect for women in the fullness of their dignity. It means protecting children against abuse and social corruption. It means accepting the incapable and the handicapped as whole human beings. It means understanding and making others understand that the poor, the hungry or the sick have a right to assistance; it is not a matter of favours or commiseration.

The twentieth century has basically been one of the denial of human rights, which have been flouted by the emergence of materialistic and totalitarian ideologies which made liberal use of torture, imprisonment, gulags and brainwashing. After so much distress and degradation, the twenty-first century must be one for rehabilitating respect for the human beings' intrinsic value.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now call on the Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland, Mr. Janusz Stańczyk.

Mr. Stańczyk (Poland): On the day of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, allow me to stress the quite extraordinary evolution of human rights ideas and principles in internal and international relations. I remind the Assembly that the United Nations Charter contains only trace references to human rights. Three years after the signing of the Charter, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — a document lacking the binding force of an international treaty. Few people believed it could change the world. But from the very beginning, human rights and their protection and promotion provided a unique stimulus to the growth of international law and the evolution of international relations understood as politics among nations. Human rights issues rapidly ceased to be the domain of international law alone. They became an object of the policy of States and action by social movements, including an ever-growing number of increasingly powerful non-governmental organizations, as well as a focus of mass-media attention. Let me stress that human rights developed into a prominent factor of international relations and in the post-cold-war period have become a basic element of the nascent international order.

The defenders of human rights ideas and principles — intellectuals, politicians, leaders of non-governmental organizations — shared the view that respect for the rights embodied in the Declaration does not by itself guarantee for people freedom of choice and expression or their free development. That is why, since the adoption of the Declaration in 1948, an impressive body of international law has been enacted, comprising binding instruments such as the International Covenants on Human Rights and Conventions on torture, racism and discrimination against women — instruments without which human rights would be merely declaratory. As a representative of Poland, I am proud that my country initiated one of these legal regulations — the Convention on the Rights of the Child — protecting the youngest human inhabitants of our planet. A comprehensive system of human rights mechanisms — such as special rapporteurs, experts, working groups and, above all, treaty-monitoring bodies — have also been established.

My delegation remains convinced that all the elements of the expanded United Nations apparatus dealing with human rights — that is, the Commission on Human Rights and its mechanisms, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office — are equally important and should be synergetically linked with one another. All of them should closely cooperate with the non-governmental organizations. We consider it particularly important that the High Commissioner and the mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights, including the special rapporteurs, be able to rely on the full cooperation of Member States for not only declaratory but also effective support.

Allow me to confirm again that the Government of the Republic of Poland remains dedicated to supporting all the efforts directed at strengthening the preventive capacities of the Commission on Human Rights. Let me also stress that my Government places great hope in the mission of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson. While commending her on her achievements to date, we pledge her our continuous support in her difficult and noble task.

Progress in the implementation of human rights standards has not been devoid of problems. We are still confronted with opposition by many States to the universalization of human rights and to the expansion of protective institutions. Many States remain beyond the reach of any instruments of human rights protection, while some of them refer to particularism in the approach to human rights, thus challenging the universal standards being set at the United Nations.

We have no doubt that the battle for human rights ideals and principles is far from over. We know that further efforts by the international community are necessary if Governments are to accept basic standards of human rights and recognize that their effective protection is possible only when perpetrators of human rights violations know that they will be held accountable for their actions.

The United Nations human rights implementation strategy should be dedicated to promoting an extensive programme of technical assistance and advisory services directed at all countries that need them and that are willing to cooperate with the United Nations. The High Commissioner for Human Rights should be equipped with adequate budgetary, organizational and human capabilities to match the magnitude and diversity of needs.

The world has came a long way since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Totalitarian systems and systems based on racial discrimination have been overthrown in the name of human rights. The catalogue of rights has been expanded. Despite various kinds of regional, cultural and ideological resistance, the recognition of human rights is gradually becoming universal. The lack of observance of human rights can no longer be shielded from criticism and condemnation by the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. We welcome this revolutionary development, a qualitatively new feature of the international order for which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has laid the foundations.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Kastrup (Germany): Let me, at the outset, express my full support for the statement made by my Austrian colleague on behalf of the European Union.

When, in 1948, United Nations representatives from all parts of the world adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they wanted to give an answer to the unprecedented atrocities of the Second World War — genocide, annihilation of livelihoods, mass expulsions. The Declaration was a sign of hope after years of tyranny and oppression. It recognized the inherent dignity and worth of the human person and proclaimed the ideal of every member of the human family living free from fear and want.

Today, 50 years later, much has been achieved. But we have to admit that for many people the stipulations of the Declaration are still far from being a reality. None of us can say that in his or her country there is no room for improvement. We cannot claim that after all these years of hard work the noble goals of the Universal Declaration have been reached.

We have to build upon what we have achieved. For example, numerous new or restored democracies have proved that respect for human rights, democracy, good governance and the rule of law, on the one hand, and social and economic development, on the other hand, are inseparably linked, and that due respect for human rights has made them less susceptible to detrimental external influences.

Yesterday, we adopted the Declaration on human rights defenders. The Declaration will be a document of reference for the numerous groups and individuals who tirelessly, often at the risk of their own lives, speak up both for respect for human rights and for victims of human rights violations. This morning we awarded the United Nations Human Rights Prizes to outstanding human rights defenders. My Government pays tribute to those heroes of our day.

The year 1998 was also key in the fight against impunity, one of the root causes of continuing worldwide human rights violations. International law is rapidly developing in this field. For the first time ever, a defendant was convicted of genocide by an international tribunal.

The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in July sent another important signal. It was a major step forward towards a world order in which the force of law, not the law of force, prevails. Human rights violators are becoming increasingly aware that there are fewer and fewer safe havens and that the vicious circle of impunity is being broken.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in Paris, Germany, as an "enemy State", was absent. Poland abstained, and so did South Africa. I am glad that these three countries, after having overcome their nightmares of national socialism, of communism and of apartheid, have now joined their efforts in a group initiative to make their specific contribution to the promotion of human rights. So far, Poland, South Africa and Germany have organized, in close cooperation, three international symposiums in which numerous Government, United Nations and non-governmental organization experts participated.

The three countries also played their role in the preparation of the resolution on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted unanimously by the Assembly this morning. I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to you, Mr. President, for your readiness to present the draft of that resolution to the General Assembly as your own, as a President's text, thus effectively highlighting the importance of the commitment undertaken by the Member States to fulfil without any reservation the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize what is at the heart of the Declaration: human rights — all human rights — are not presented to mankind by States out of generosity. No; human rights are inherent in every single human being, without exception and distinction. Every human being is entitled to those human rights, and it is our duty, not our choice, to respect, promote and protect them.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal, Mr. Jacques Baudin.

Mr. Baudin (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): Senegal associates itself fully and unreservedly with the statement made by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the Organization of African Unity.

In commemorating today the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reaffirm our shared conviction that there is an imprescriptible need to build, together, a pluralistic, democratic, peaceful, open and tolerant society. As Mr. Henri Laugier, former member of the Commission on Human Rights, stressed:

> "The 1948 Declaration is a mobilization of the universal conscience for the defence of all human values that are arrayed around the word 'freedom'".

In this respect, I can say without hesitation that the Declaration has definitely contributed to the process of emancipation and decolonization and thereby fostered the emergence of a new international order. Some of its articles also made their political mark on the two International Covenants of 1966, and even on the concept of the right to development. The 1948 Declaration thus eloquently enshrines three principles: rule of law, human rights and development.

The first International Conference on Human Rights, held in Tehran in 1967, and the Conference that took place in Vienna in June 1993, confirmed our common support for the principles of the Declaration of 1948, which are the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. The actions of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the initiatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, fit within that collective dynamic, and their remarkable work deserves a solemn tribute here today.

The role of the United Nations in the context of the promotion of the right to development and the struggle against poverty should be strengthened to allow all human beings to live a decent life. Today, aware of the insufficiency of our actions and of our obligations over the past 50 years, we must make efforts to ensure that the international legal human rights instruments are signed, ratified and implemented by all Member States.

For the same reasons, we should also pay attention to respect for and promotion of the rights of the child and the struggle to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Nor should we forget the rights of the elderly, and in 1999 we will observe the International Year of Older Persons.

In another, equally important area, we must do everything possible to ensure that the Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in July in Rome, enters into force as quickly as possible. Senegal, the first State to sign the Statute of the Court, intends to be among the first to deposit the instruments of ratification.

My country co-sponsored the draft resolution on the Declaration on the rights and responsibilities of human rights defenders. That Declaration, which constitutes a genuine charter of the rights and duties of all the bodies of civil society, stresses the need for fruitful cooperation and dialogue to be promoted among the non-governmental organizations, other actors of civil society and Governments.

It is thus our responsibility to implement the Declaration and to promote human rights education.

Following the guidelines of His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic, Senegal has already begun teaching human rights and international humanitarian law in training schools, including those for personnel of the armed forces, the security services and the paramilitary corps. Moreover, my country, which is a party to virtually all international legal instruments on human rights, has established an interministerial committee for human rights and international humanitarian law, one of whose main tasks is to ensure compliance with our international commitments in this sphere.

All of here in this sanctuary of the collective international conscience, from which all self-righteousness must be banished, should look back and maintain this truth for the future, as a credo: The art of engaging in good rhetoric must not preclude the art of doing good and complying with our commitments. Thus can we make up our delays, rectify our omissions and correct our errors. Then the third millennium can be one of human dignity, equality and prosperity.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): Today we solemnly celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is a time for reaffirming our commitment to and achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights over the past 50 years. This is also the right occasion for calm analysis and critical review of remaining obstacles and shortcomings with respect to what can be done to further the human rights cause. Our delegation welcomes the adoption today by the General Assembly of the resolution entitled "Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and hopes that the present review will help us chart appropriate directions for our future activities based on genuine concern rather than polemic politics, on cooperation rather than confrontation.

Thanks to the tireless struggle of all oppressed peoples, the world has witnessed fundamental changes over the past 50 years. Many countries have gained their national independence and joined the United Nations, bringing the Organization's membership to a total of 185. In today's international affairs, the trend towards peace, democratization, independence and respect for human rights is well recognized.

In many areas of the world, however, underdevelopment continues to be the most serious threat to the effective enjoyment of human rights. According to James Gustave Speth, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, among the 4.4 billion people who live in developing countries, almost three fifths live in communities without basic sanitation, almost one third are without safe drinking water, a quarter lack adequate housing and a fifth are undernourished. Our common cause of human rights, including the right to development, thus demands further concerted efforts and strong commitment.

Five years ago, at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Member States made a thorough review of the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights. It was rightly emphasized that universality and specificity are two organically interrelated aspects of human rights, which do not exclude each other but instead coexist and interact closely. While human rights has a universal character, its expression and implementation in the national context should remain primarily within the competence and responsibility of each State; the complex variety of problems, the different economic, social and cultural realities and the unique value systems prevailing in each country should be taken into consideration. We firmly believe that cooperation on the basis of respect for sovereignty, dialogue in good faith and peaceful negotiation, rather than confrontation, conditionalities, the use or threat of use of force and interference in the internal affairs of other States, constitute the best way to promote and protect human rights.

On 30 November 1998, the National Assembly of Viet Nam celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yesterday, the Human Rights Research Centre at the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy organized a seminar with the participation of many Vietnamese and foreign officials, scholars and research workers. On these occasions, Viet Nam reaffirmed that the most fundamental achievement in the Vietnamese people's struggle for human rights has been our success in winning the right to live in peace, national independence, unification and territorial integrity, and the right to make our own choice of political, social and economic development.

On the occasion of this highly significant celebration, let us all reaffirm our commitment to the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and continue our efforts to ensure that it remains a source of inspiration for the further promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms — political, economic, social, civil and cultural — including the right to development.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Arda (Turkey): In the history of mankind there are few documents that stand the test of time and have an enduring effect on the organization and behaviour of societies and individuals. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 50 years ago by the General Assembly, is one such document. It has charted a profound yet simple course for all of us. It recognized that, purely by virtue of their humanity, all human beings without distinction are entitled to all human rights.

The States Members of the United Nations did not come to that conclusion as a result of wishful thinking. It was a direct response to the human suffering that had been experienced before and the only course for a dignified way of life for all. Never before in international relations had States agreed to limit their right to exercise their authority over their own citizens and open themselves up to international scrutiny.

During the last 50 years, a body of human rights instruments has come into effect. The many ideas of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been translated into action and legislation across the board.

There is a greater awareness that human rights encompass not only civil and political rights, but also cultural, economic and social rights. The interdependence of all human rights is more evident today than ever.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents our common pledge to uphold and promote universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is explicitly inherent in the Declaration that the fulfilment of this universal pledge is not the responsibility of the States alone, but also of each and every group and individual. By the same token, the rights enshrined in the Declaration are not derived from the ties of an individual to a sovereign State. They are universal and absolute in nature. They can be subject to violation by every actor of society.

Human rights are a dynamic concept. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this concept has continuously evolved. The boundaries of human rights have expanded. New perceptions and complicated challenges have emerged. The importance of the role given to the United Nations in the Declaration has become more crucial.

Yet, after 50 years of substantial work, we are far from the ideal. In many parts of the world, there is growing poverty. Ethnic or religious conflicts are taking a huge human toll. The right to life is challenged in many parts of the world. Only recently, we have seen dramatic affronts to human dignity and rights. Underdevelopment and economic and social deprivation often blur our civil and political rights and render them meaningless. Such a situation erodes the moral basis of our solemn commitments.

Our commemoration today could have been better served by concrete action, rather than lofty rhetoric. We need a total commitment to the eradication of poverty and illiteracy. There must be an increasing international effort to promote ethnic and religious harmony and tolerance. Future generations must be assured that they will not be subject to discrimination.

Human rights are of concern and a challenge to all of us. This challenge must be met, not only with the arbitrary and random attention of a few, but through the collective action of all for the rule of law, transparency, the eradication of absolute poverty, and economic, social and cultural development.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mrs. Caba Camara (Côte d'Ivoire) (*interpretation from French*): The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights allows us to summarize the progress that has been made in the sphere of human rights, to assess their impact on the daily life of every individual and to propose new orientations to ensure that respect for human rights becomes a reality.

It cannot be denied that progress has been made in human rights codification, structures and mechanisms. The creation of international courts to judge war crimes and of the International Criminal Court in Rome will make it possible to seek redress and thus put an end to impunity. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action brought human rights into the democratic tradition and awareness has become widespread of the need to ensure their respect. Nonetheless, we must strive to implement the principles of non-selectivity and impartiality, which, sadly, have not yet been widely accepted.

The role of non-governmental organizations in promoting and defending human rights throughout the world is significant. They must not only sound the alarm, but contribute to the promotion of human rights by helping and advising the States.

Despite undeniable progress, flagrant and massive human rights violations, even genocide, continue to be perpetrated throughout the world. The international community has tirelessly condemned these violations and imposed sanctions in response to them, but not always with much success. It must, above all, seek the root causes of these violations and work to establish an environment conducive to respect for and the promotion of human rights.

Côte d'Ivoire has made the promotion and respect of human rights keystones of its domestic policy and has ratified the major international human rights instruments. It has co-sponsored all the resolutions aimed at promoting human rights.

The Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire is firmly rooted in democracy and free enterprise. As President Henri Konan Bédié said recently:

> "Côte d'Ivoire is irrevocably committed to strengthening its state of law, the guarantor of freedoms and solidarity. This ideal defines our exacting and lofty concept of democracy. In this spirit, our Constitution proclaims as the most basic right the principle of defending human and civil rights, guaranteeing freedom of expression, opinion, religion and enterprise. Justice, the key institution of any state of law, is at the heart of these founding principles and of current trends in Ivorian society".

From the earliest years of independence, the Ivorian Government has understood that promoting human rights goes hand in hand with development and peace. The late President Félix Houphouët-Boigny stated that peace and poverty are not good bedfellows. Above all, we must, as my country has striven to do, promote access for all to education, health care and basic social services so that every citizen may fully enjoy his rights and live in dignity. For us, development, the foundation of peace, is the basis of the promotion of human rights, the *sine qua non* for enjoying civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Extreme poverty is the very negation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As the late President Houphouët-Boigny said, a hungry man is not a free man. In strengthening international cooperation in promoting human rights, we must focus first on human rights education and training.

The creation of a favourable environment also requires increased official development assistance to achieve the goals of 0.7 per cent of gross national product, profitable prices for commodities, debt relief or conversion to social projects, and the adoption of effective measures to reduce the negative impact of globalization on the economies of developing countries.

My country welcomes the Secretary-General's proposal to integrate human rights into all United Nations activities. Above all, agencies should sponsor the promotion of human rights.

On this occasion, my delegation wishes to pay tribute to the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund to promote and protect the rights of children and encourages the initiatives of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank to combat poverty and discrimination against women, which are the sources of many human rights violations.

We urgently appeal to other institutions and donors to support the efforts of developing countries, which are seeking to achieve access for all in the near future to basic health care, education, nutrition, work and basic social services, the keys to a true promotion of human rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea) (*interpretation from French*): In commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we should take to heart the profound historical significance this uplifting event has had for the future of humanity. Indeed, the Universal Declaration was the first document in the history of humankind to proclaim the collective commitment of the international community to "human rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations". The Universal Declaration has served for the past half century as a source of inspiration and as the basis for subsequent progress in the field of human rights.

The Republic of Korea also celebrated its fiftieth anniversary this year. In 1948, the first democratic and representative Government in the history of our country was established through free general elections. A Constitution embodying a commitment to the principles of human dignity and fundamental freedoms was also proclaimed. Today, half a century later, under the leadership of President Kim Dae-jung, the Republic of Korea is experiencing steady progress towards the simultaneous flourishing of a true democracy, a stable market economy and a society that supports all human rights for all.

At the dawn of the next millennium, and in particular on this auspicious occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, we are gathered here to affirm our commitment to the noble cause of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this context, my delegation wishes to make a few observations on the aspects we deem the most important.

First, according to our own experiences in political and economic development in the last 50 years, a comprehensive approach that encompasses civil, political, economic and social rights has proved to be the most effective in implementing the human rights agenda. We are convinced that democracy, development and respect for human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, as affirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Indeed, talk of respect for human rights rings hollow without serious efforts to eradicate poverty, empower individuals and their communities and promote women's rights as an integral part of human rights. Moreover, special attention should be given to the needs of vulnerable groups of the population, such as children, the disabled, refugees and internally displaced persons.

Secondly, the United Nations and its Member States should renew their efforts to have all countries sign and ratify the six principal international human rights instruments, in particular the two International Covenants. It is also very important that United Nations Member States respect and implement their commitments as States parties to international human rights instruments.

Thirdly, we must take effective steps to collectively prevent situations in which massive human rights violations take place, as these are among the root causes of conflict in the post-cold-war era. It is essential that the international community eradicate the culture of impunity that currently prevails in many conflict situations. In this connection, my delegation ardently desires to see the International Criminal Court begin its activities at the earliest possible date.

Since the election of President Kim Dae-jung, my Government has taken concrete steps to bolster its national human rights safeguards mechanisms. These steps include preparations for a human rights law and the creation of a national human rights institution. We believe that this initiative will enhance the mechanisms of human rights protection and raise public awareness in this regard.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to echo the call made by Mrs. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the statement she made in Paris:

> "All human rights for all — this should be our common call to action on this anniversary and in the years to come."

We earnestly hope that by the centennial of the Universal Declaration a broad culture of human rights will prevail in every corner of the world, thus faithfully fulfilling the vision of the Universal Declaration and providing a framework conducive to peace, security and prosperity for future generations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to inform representatives that after having held three meetings, fewer than half of the speakers on the list have spoken. This is because many speakers have gone beyond the five-minute limit established by the General Assembly itself. I hope that the remaining speakers will kindly abide by the five-minute limit.

The meeting rose at 12.10 a.m., Friday, 11 December.

United Nations

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General Assembly
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Official Records

89th plenary meeting
Friday, 11 December 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti .... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 46 *(continued)*

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(a) Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): The Philippines is especially privileged to take part in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As one of the original 48 countries that adopted the Universal Declaration, the Philippines reaffirms its abiding faith in that Declaration. It regards the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms contained therein as universal and inalienable. They are inherent in the individual and are indispensable to the dignity and integrity of every human being.

The delegations which are speaking today attest to the value we all attach to human rights. This reflects a shared recognition of what this historic document has done to change the lives of all mankind. It has served as a powerful tool by which Governments have been made accountable and their actions measured.

Since its adoption in 1948, the Declaration has spawned, and continues to give birth to, numerous conventions and declarations. The rights of women, children and individuals who are disadvantaged have increasingly received special focus. This is proof that the Declaration is not only a living document but is equal to the challenges of changing times and circumstances.

Nevertheless, in recent years, questions have been raised about the universality and relevance of the Declaration as new and complex human rights issue have emerged. The Philippines views this development as a healthy sign — an indication that more and more States are showing an interest in human rights and are willing to spend time on questions that will help in the elaboration and further development of the principles enshrined in the Declaration. In this regard, we commend the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner herself for taking an active part in the debate by providing a forum where questions can be asked and answers formulated.

As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, we must not only take stock of achievements in the field of human rights but also focus on the work that remains to be done. During the first 50 years of the Declaration, emphasis was placed on the promotion of political and civil rights. However, those rights largely remain on paper for the great number of people who are effectively prevented from enjoying those rights because of poverty — the homeless, the hungry, the disabled and those who have no access to the minimum basic

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necessities to live decently. Particularly in countries with pervasive poverty, economic rights are as important as civil and political rights.

Therefore, we believe that the next 50 years should be dedicated to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development in order to fulfil the promise contained in the Universal Declaration of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. In this regard, it may be opportune to elaborate on article 28 of the Declaration to create a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration can be realized and to which everyone is entitled.

Perhaps one of the most important factors for the future of human rights is how well we and our United Nations Organization can meet the challenge of realizing the universality of human rights. Our Organization must itself be more democratic and less prone to politicizing human rights, and it must have the resources it requires to carry out its mandates, nearly all of which, if not all, directly deal with and affect human rights. As individual nations, we must work to make human rights a reality for all. But we can do much more with a United Nations that itself functions with full respect for the basic principles of human rights and which has the resources it needs to do so.

To our mind, there are critical areas that require our particular and committed attention if we are to make human rights a reality for all. One is human rights education. We must continue to make this our priority, for only through an enlightened citizenry can human rights be defended and be made secure. Another is the enhanced partnership with civil society, particularly with non-governmental organizations. The value of their work in human rights cannot be overemphasized.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration comes at a critical juncture. Many parts of the world are in the throes of economic crises that have reversed the fortunes of many States and the successes attained in raising the standard of living of millions of people. Globalization stares human rights in the face. It may be time to view human rights not only in terms of individual rights but also from the perspectives of collective rights and human responsibilities.

Looking back over the 50 years that have elapsed since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mankind has made substantial strides towards the development of a culture of human rights. As we look ahead to the next millennium, we must be unflagging in our efforts to make human rights a reality for every person, especially for those who have less in life. We must take up the challenge of making the Universal Declaration truly universal.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Chkheidze (Georgia): The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most crucial events to mark the history of mankind. Our special meeting today gives us one more opportunity to look back at our deeds, evaluate our achievements, and identify and tackle the root causes of our disappointments.

When we speak about the eradication of poverty, migration, environment, the problems of terrorism and so on, we must always take into account the pivotal element in all those challenges: the human factor and the respect of human rights.

The intensification of activities aimed at the protection of human rights and the strengthening of new and restored democracies, together with the positive achievements realized, have unveiled many a problem whose resolution will require a complex approach. Effective cooperation based on the agreements of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with Governments and with the non-governmental organizations of different countries should be further developed, as should be the human rights education system. Assistance to States aimed at creating and developing national structures must be more systematic and better planned.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, the problems of economic development and armed conflict are strongly correlated with human rights issues. Millions of people have lost their lives during bloody confrontations in different parts of the world, and the rights of a number of individuals are being trampled underfoot and overridden.

The plight of those who have become destitute and who suffer from poverty and economic privation is no less worrisome. Unfortunately, international efforts have not been persistent enough to overcome these factors or to allow us to speak about any considerable achievements in the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is regrettable that the effective mechanism for the protection of human rights remains the use of force. That is why it is necessary to work actively to elaborate this mechanism in order to decrease the side effects of its application.

The humanitarian situation of innocent people must be taken into account during the enforcement of sanctions, as well as during the enforcement of peace.

The creation of the International Criminal Court appears to be a landmark achievement that we can take pride in on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everybody should know that crimes against humanity will no longer go unpunished and that the culture of impunity will cease to exist.

Georgia has a deep-rooted tradition of tolerance and humanity. The ups and downs of history and instigated conflicts have not been able to erase this tradition, and today we are building and developing our national institutions on the basis of this abiding character of the Georgian people. We have abolished capital punishment and introduced the position of public defender, and the respective commissions of the parliament have grown into a considerable force. In the governmental structures, human rights responsibilities are on the same level as matters of national security.

Despite serious hardships Georgia continues building its State. The number of refugees from the region occupied by the separatist regime exceeds 300,000. Considerable property has been destroyed. Georgia continues taking measures to build confidence between the parties by elaborating mutually profitable economic projects and pursuing a policy of reconciliation. The successful outcome of this policy, together with the will of the Georgian people and the activities of its Government, depends on the assistance of the international community.

In his letter to the world leaders, President Shevardnadze called upon the family of nations to spare no effort in finding ways to resolve the problems of refugees and displaced persons and in tackling the tasks of peace-building and economic recovery. In Georgia we have every prerequisite for attaining these objectives.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On this fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the conference that gave birth to it, let me say that this Declaration is one of the international community's great achievements. The right to development is a universal, inalienable right of human beings. The conference confirmed the indivisibility of human rights, and it recognized the unique cultural, religious and historic particularities of various States and nations. It also decided that human rights were going to be treated on the basis of impartiality, neutrality and cooperation in international relations.

After so many years, this celebration today provides a unique opportunity for the United Nations and its Members to increase efforts to promote awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to enhance the commitments to its provisions, and to assess comprehensively the achievements reached in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the Vienna Declaration, and to see what remains to be done in this area and to provide for all possible efforts to implement those decisions.

The legislative framework protecting human rights in Mauritania is based on our constitution, which guarantees all citizens equal rights and responsibilities. The second paragraph stipulates:

> "The people are committed to these values and they are committed to the Islamic religion and they are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights."

They are also committed to the international conventions to which Mauritania is party.

The first article of our constitution states that the Republic "guarantees all citizens equality before the law, without any discriminations on the bases of race, origin, gender or social status".

In this framework, we have promulgated laws guided by the constitution and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — laws such as the general employment code and other laws governing parliamentary elections, as well as laws guaranteeing multiple political parties and freedom of the press. We have a human rights commission to promote these values, and it is entrusted with the task of promoting human rights and implementing national strategies to combat poverty. Social expenditures in our country represent 37 per cent of our budget — that is, nearly double what was recommended by the Social Summit in this regard.

As part of this, we believe that the advancement of women and the fight against illiteracy are very important. We have a secretariat that was established precisely to promote the advancement of women and to combat illiteracy. They are having a direct impact on the family and the child and on our society in general.

My delegation pays tribute to the efforts by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. My Government is prepared to cooperate fully with that Committee as well as with all other human rights bodies. On this basis, my country presented its first report to the Committee last year in implementation of article 9, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. We hope that this will be a first stage of a constructive dialogue enabling the Committee to acquire clarification regarding procedures of a legislative, administrative and judicial nature which Mauritania put into effect in the implementation of the provisions of the International Convention.

My country views favourably the holding in the year 2001 of an international conference on the combating of racism, and we invite the Commission on Human Rights to take the necessary steps so that this desired result can be achieved.

We are convinced that we must halt the various violations of human rights that have been witnessed in several regions of the world. At the same time we must prevent the recurrence of racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing, as well as attacks against creeds and religious beliefs. We call for the establishment of an atmosphere of peace, brotherhood, tolerance and of mutual respect in order to establish and promote human rights, which in turn will guarantee the success of collective efforts to establish human rights throughout the world.

The Acting President: At this juncture I would like to inform Members that we still have 58 speakers remaining on the list of speakers. In order to be able to hear all the speakers today — and, I hope, by the end of the afternoon meeting — I would like to appeal strongly to speakers, as the President already did yesterday, to respect the five-minute time limit for their statements. I thank you very much for your cooperation.

I now give the floor to the representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Calovski (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Yesterday, the Republic of Macedonia, like other Member States of the United Nations, observed the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a common standard of achievement for the further promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The struggle of the Macedonian people for freedom, justice and peace, like that of other peoples, has had a bright and difficult moment in its long history. We have always believed that all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms, and that it is of crucial importance to promote the development of friendly relations among nations.

We are looking at the observance of the Universal Declaration as an essential part of the activities of the United Nations to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United Nations efforts to prevent conflicts, to solve the ongoing ones, to strengthen international peace and security and to promote international cooperation in the political, economic and social fields will not have real meaning if they do not enable the enjoyment of all human rights, so clearly defined in the Declaration. It is important, therefore, to reaffirm that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal and indivisible, that they all are important, whether political, economic, social, civil or cultural.

We do not see the Universal Declaration as a final achievement or the last document on human rights. In real life, it will be important to reaffirm some of the rights espoused by the Declaration, and some should be further developed and adequately defined. Our actions should result in eliminating all forms of discrimination and should strengthen the dignity and worth of the human person. Our concern that human rights and fundamental freedoms are not fully respected everywhere — that they are violated — should strengthen our resolve to do much more in future.

Today, regretfully, all human persons do not enjoy the same standard of living. The gap is huge, and the efforts to narrow it must continue more resolutely. Human solidarity is an absolute necessity. The globalization of international life will not automatically close the gap between the rich and the poor and between the developed and developing countries. Our

Organization has the duty to influence future development so that growth could be bigger, democracy stronger, the rule of law a must, international cooperation less burdened with various barriers and conditions, and regional and global integration be enhanced.

In the present period of change, the United Nations should be the locomotive of that change. All human persons should feel themselves equal and worthy citizens of our common globe. All human rights and fundamental freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration should therefore be fully observed everywhere and by everybody.

Let me end by quoting a sentence from yesterday's address by the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Kiro Gligorov, at the Academy on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Skopje, the capital of my country:

> "On the threshold of the twenty-first century, the whole of humanity is faced with an impressive task: to build a world of human rights, a world in which the death penalty will be a matter of the past, a world devoid of torture, where social, civil, political — all — human rights will be equal for all, regardless of the social, national and religious affiliation of people. We should all try to contribute to a world in which the respect of human rights will be deeply rooted in the culture of every society and in the minds of all people."

The Acting President: I give the floor now to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Jele (South Africa): Yesterday marked an important milestone in the annals of humankind. On that day 50 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Universal Declaration, this body reaffirmed in concise and simple language the faith of the peoples of the world in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

Until recently, that simple but eloquent phrase had a hollow ring to the vast majority of the people of South Africa. Ours was a political system which stood in stark contrast to the ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration. Apartheid was a racially based political order which the international community declared a crime against humanity.

Thus, for us in South Africa the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has always been a beacon of hope. It is the one instrument that has carried the hopes and aspirations of our people.

The Declaration opened a new chapter in the field of human rights, particularly as it specifies the universal nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, that they are the inalienable rights of all human beings and the responsibility of Governments. Of utmost importance in this stipulation is the intrinsic value it attaches to the right to development, which, South Africa believes, underpins the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Though underdevelopment should not and must not be invoked to shield or justify human rights violations, experience has also shown that lack of development constitutes an obstacle to the full realization of all freedoms and human rights. There is a compelling need, therefore, to emphasize that the right to development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

South Africa views with deep concern current tendencies towards racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance in some parts of the world. In this context, it reiterates the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on the need for Governments and other bodies not only to condemn such practices, but also to institutionalize measures and programmes against bigotry and new forms of racism. We therefore look forward to the convening and successful outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance not later than the year 2001.

The establishment of national human rights institutions could play a pivotal role in the entrenchment of a culture of respect for human rights worldwide, thus making a major contribution towards the prevention of violations.

In the constitutional democracy that we have established in South Africa, human rights have taken pride of place. They have come to occupy centre stage in our daily lives and in the conduct of external relations with other States. Accordingly, our foreign policy is guided by human rights considerations indicating the kind of influence we wish to exert on the global arena. It is in this spirit that South Africa yesterday lodged with the

United Nations our National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

In lodging this National Action Plan, we have not only committed ourselves to the international community but also to the people of South Africa. Thus, in South Africa, the Plan was launched yesterday to coincide with country-wide celebrations relating to the fiftieth anniversary.

The approved National Action Plan constitutes an integrated and systematic national strategy of government aimed at the protection, improvement and advancement of human rights in my country. Through this measure and as an audit of the human rights situation, the Government seeks to identify areas in need of protection, improvement and advancement. The objective is also to identify and agree on areas of cooperation between government, the private sector, civil society and other role players in the promotion and protection of human rights.

On this auspicious occasion, I wish to announce that my country has also deposited with the United Nations its instruments of ratification relating to the two Covenants that form part of the International Bill of Rights, as well as the conventions dealing with racial discrimination and torture.

Let me state that we in South Africa are painfully aware that much needs to be done to make human rights a living reality for our people. This is a task that my Government takes seriously. Through the Action Plan and the international conventions to which we are party, we intend to strive towards that goal.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gold (Israel): Israel has strong ties to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that go beyond the values the Declaration enshrines. Both the State of Israel and the Declaration sprang forth in the wake of the same international outcry to restore rights that were violated as never before.

The rights recognized by the Declaration were not new to this century. Its authors, including Jewish scholars, drew on sources as ancient as the first chapter of the Bible, which proclaims that every person is moulded in the image of God. The Bible commands us to love and respect the stranger in our midst. As it is written: "Thou shalt neither harass a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt".

Yet in this century, these rights were trampled and tossed asunder with such horrific abandon that humanity as a whole was shaken to its foundations. The Nazi slaughter of six million Jews, with unparalleled brutality and humiliation — and the indifference of others — marked the gravest, most incomparable violation of human rights in human history. Out of the ashes, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came to remind the world of the principles that should have been guiding rules of every society.

So, too, the right of the Jewish people to their homeland was not new to the twentieth century. It was recognized by the League of Nations as a historic, pre-existing right which had been denied the Jewish people for centuries past. But it was only the Holocaust that woke the world community to the urgent need to establish a Jewish State in Israel.

The historic link between Israel and the Universal Declaration is underscored by the fact that some of its central authors were Jewish Zionists, including the French Jewish leader René Cassin.

We can never truly compensate for the tragedy of the Second World War. The words of a thousand Universal Declarations could be read in less time than the names of just the children slaughtered by the Nazis. The entire population of Israel is still less than the number of those wiped out in the Holocaust.

But the founders of Israel insisted that their State symbolize a new hope, resurrecting the age-old values that seemed buried with the victims. Israel's Declaration of Independence proclaims that the Jewish State

> "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex".

Among the first acts of the new State was to restore freedom of religion to the holy places of Israel, making them the freest and most accessible they had been in two millennia. This policy continued after 1967. Israel also put in place an active High Court. Even in dealing with territories Israel had come to administer after invading armies had used them for attacks, Israel's Supreme Court gave equal consideration to petitions brought by Arab residents of these areas. This was, in fact, the only instance in history where an administered population was granted access to the highest civilian court of the administering Power.

We are most proud of that High Court's achievement in 1992, when it helped enact the Basic Laws that serve as Israel's de facto bill of rights, protecting the right to life, liberty and dignity; privacy and employment, among others. Let me add in this context that democracy, based on accountable government, is the best assurance for the protection of human rights.

This year, in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Israel has incorporated the Declaration into the curriculum of every high school civics class. Human rights, after all, are not just for speeches; they must filter down to the classroom, the textbook and the entire political culture of every United Nations Member State.

And yet, I am saddened to say that, despite these efforts, we are still forced to simultaneously deal with the constant threat of terrorism in our streets. In spite of the Oslo Accords signed five years ago, terrorism has since taken the lives of close to 300 Israelis. Liberty and basic human dignity are shattered when citizens cannot ride a bus, cross a street or sit at a café without the fear of a suicide bomb.

In this regard, let me add one note of caution. Terrorism depends on a vast infrastructure of support, often under the jurisdiction of sovereign States. Extolling human rights in this forum, on the one hand, and at the same time allowing one's territory to be a launching ground for terrorist operations is a mockery of the Declaration and an insult to the millions whose deaths inspired it.

We must, instead, stand firm in the face of these threats and allow our nations to live up to both the word and the spirit of this historic Declaration and to those of an even more ancient source. For it is written: "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue".

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): Today, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, more than 70 other human rights instruments are in existence. A consensus has emerged on the importance of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all mankind. The adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993 is testimony to this. Gratified as we are by these positive developments, the debate on the human rights agenda will of necessity continue, as much still needs to be done. Hence, my delegation believes that our commemoration of this anniversary should be characterized by a sober and frank assessment of what has been achieved and what has not in the promotion and protection of human rights for the past half century.

Vast numbers of humanity in different parts of the world have not been able to enjoy the rights proclaimed in the Declaration. Hundreds of millions in the developing world are denied their right to development. This has become more evident and pronounced in the context of a rapidly globalized economy. The Asian financial crisis provides a clear illustration. Virtually overnight, the gains of decades of hard work and prudent management on the part of the Governments and peoples of the affected Asian countries were mercilessly swept away by the onslaught of the currency speculators and manipulators. Doubtless, the fund managers of Wall Street or the rating agencies had scant regard for respecting the rights of the poor labourers, farmers and petty traders in the countries concerned when making their decisions to suddenly pull out funds or to downgrade the ratings of certain economies.

Human rights abuses are still rampant and occur daily, particularly in areas of conflict situations. It is appalling and shameful that despite the universal adoption of the Declaration and other instruments, innocent civilians, particularly the most vulnerable ones, such as women and children, continue to be subjected to these violations. The international community must not only condemn those responsible for these grave human rights violations, but it must also see to it that they are punished. The appropriate mechanisms in place should be fully utilized to ensure the full protection and enjoyment of these rights.

It is most laudable that more and more people are involved in the universal effort to promote and protect human rights. However, it is important that those who are especially active and vigorous in these efforts should maintain a high degree of consistency, objectivity and credibility. Governments, leaders and others who wish to speak, much less pontificate, about human rights must be willing to look closely at their own situations first.

As we embark on the universal promotion of human rights, we will have to ask ourselves a number of pertinent questions: can we be truly objective? Should we be selective? Is it fair to apply double standards? Can we avoid being biased in our considerations? Are we absolutely clear about the situation or particular incident we wish to comment on? Do we fully understand the political, social and religious sensitivities involved and the implications of our actions? Should we not empathize rather than chastise when in certain situations the parties involved face fundamental political, social or economic constraints? When we talk of rights, should not there also be responsibilities and obligations? These are, not doubt, difficult, even disconcerting, questions. But they must be asked if we wish to maintain our credibility and moral authority as champions or spokesmen of human rights.

Malaysia reiterates its conviction that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Human rights should not emphasize only civil and political rights. For Malaysia, as a developing country, economic, social and cultural rights, articulated through the larger framework of the right to development, are as important as civil and political rights. Widespread poverty and economic deprivation have compelled Governments of many developing countries to emphasize the economic transformation of their societies as the prerequisite for all other changes. Acknowledging the importance of economic, social and cultural rights does not necessarily relegate or ignore the importance of civil and political rights.

The Non-Aligned Movement, at its twelfth summit held in Durban, South Africa, last summer, underlined the need to review and assess the progress made in the field of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The summit also underlined the need to identify the obstacles and the ways through which they can be overcome, both by means of specific measures and by enhanced international cooperation, with a view to ensuring full enjoyment of all human rights, taking into account developments that have taken place during the last 50 years.

Malaysia strongly believes that the promotion and the protection of all human rights can be more effectively pursued through increased contact and dialogue and wider cooperation, rather than badgering and confrontation. Let us all do it together, as a truly cooperative and constructive endeavour, in the interest of all mankind, in the true spirit of the theme of this anniversary. In this the United Nations can play a pivotal role.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): Today we are gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Being on the threshold of a new millennium, it is therefore appropriate for us to reflect on and take stock of how far we have gone with our collective responsibility, as we the peoples should save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

Fifty years later humanity is still yearning for a peaceful, just and prosperous world. New vision and foresight are thus called for. Bold and imaginative decisions are required.

The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action states that "Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings". Human rights are protected and secured by standards, laws and procedures. We are all custodians of those rights. The theme of this anniversary year perfectly captures the very essence of all human rights for all.

Since 1948 the United Nations has developed a very impressive range of international human rights instruments and mechanisms. Therefore, we have at our disposal a substantive body of international human rights law. In this connection, Namibia welcomes the establishment of the International Criminal Court. We have signed the Statute and are in the process of ratifying it. Now, more than ever before, we believe that the United Nations can live up to its lofty ideal of creating a peaceful, secure and just world for us and the generations to come. To this, Namibia pledges its full and total commitment.

The list of speakers is testimony of our collective belief and acceptance of the validity of the Universal Declaration. The Universal Declaration is truly universal. We believe that this document ranks as one of the greatest aspirational documents of our history. Today, we have so many more Governments than were present on 10 December 1948 and equally more voices from the wider civil society.

The Declaration proclaims in a non-hierarchical manner the rights belonging to all people, giving equal emphasis to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, and the rights and freedoms therein are to be enjoyed by all without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status.

The international community's success to date in implementing human rights standards cries out for new constructive approaches. We have not reached the occasion to celebrate. We still have widespread discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religious belief, and twice this century we have witnessed the abominable practice of genocide. Poverty is a violation of numerous basic rights. A very high proportion of the world is living in absolute poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing, it does not seem to have an end in sight. Compounding the problem is the growing realization of the feminization of poverty. In many parts of the world there are gross violations of children's rights. Instead of being in classrooms, children are forced to be on the battlefield. Having said this, we must have the political will and commitment to reverse this process.

It is therefore vital to realize that the very essence of rights is their empowering capacity. This link should be at the core when promoting, protecting and implementing human rights.

For many years the people of Namibia were subjected to gross human rights violations, without any recourse. Therefore, following our independence, one of our main tasks was to put in place national institutions that would protect and promote human rights.

The Namibian Constitution — our supreme law, in which fundamental human rights and freedoms receive the highest possible authority — is the anchor of our values and beliefs. At independence, the Bill of Rights was used as a basis by the Namibian founding fathers and mothers of our Constitution. We looked to the Universal Declaration as the guiding document, which embodied the very norms and standards which the majority of Namibians for so long were viciously denied and fought a bitter struggle to attain.

Last year the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights agreed on an extensive training and technical support programme, which already commenced earlier this year. The main purpose of such technical assistance, for which we are most grateful, is to strengthen the national capacity of our country towards better and more efficient human rights promotion and protection.

The liberation of the individual, the creation of equal opportunities for all, including job opportunities, and the right to a decent living standard are as important as the right to vote, freedom of speech and religion. Hence, the rights-based approach for us, in Namibia, is a concrete example of just how we as Governments, along with the United Nations system, can ensure that the beneficiaries of all human rights will be enabled to utilize these rights to their fullest.

Finally, allowing human rights to flourish is economically prudent and cost-effective, and it promotes peace and stability. Hopefully, the realization of the vision of the founding fathers of the Universal Declaration, 50 years ago, will become a daily reality for the next generation in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Akwaa (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Together with all humanity we are commemorating today the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption by the international community of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represents the general framework for the subsequent international instruments whose contents now constitute what is known as international humanitarian law.

It gives me pleasure, in this respect, to confirm that the Republic of Yemen is a full party to most if not all of these international covenants and instruments. The spirit of these covenants and instruments is reflected in our constitution and in our national legislation and political approach. Among the principles called for by the Yemeni revolution is the establishment of social justice and economic prosperity and the liberation of the Yemeni people from fear, oppression, ignorance, poverty, disease and backwardness.

The Yemeni family recovered its unity when the country recovered its national unity on 22 May 1990. At that point we opted for democracy based on a multi-party system as a means of government, and for economic development based on the freedom of choice. This freedom of choice is an instrument for the full development of the individual and the society at all levels. As a result, there have been many cultural forums in our country, and the number of political parties has multiplied. It has become possible for all persons, female or male, as individuals or in groups, to exercise their rights and enjoy their full freedoms, particularly those related to the freedom of opinion, belief and the expression of convictions by all peaceful means.

Human rights have become sacred, entrenched and inalienable and are not subject to abuse. We have become legally and morally duty-bound to defend and protect these rights and to encourage others to exercise them. However, it is important to note here that it is necessary to respect the substantive relation between a person's need for material development in all fields and his need for cultural, educational and political development, because each of these developments complements the other. We cannot build our societies or civilizations without individuals who are free from poverty, fear, humiliation, oppression, ignorance and backwardness.

It is useful to confirm here that the humanitarian assistance we are providing and the subjects we are tackling in this respect should be free from double standards and from selectivity in application. Otherwise, we will lose credibility and there will be a terrible contradiction between what we call for and what we do on the ground.

We cannot but express here our appreciation and gratitude for the work done by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as the other specialized agencies of the United Nations, along with non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian groups such as the International Committees of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. We thank them all for their assistance and help, especially in the field of reinforcing human rights and protecting them against abuse and violations all over the world.

In conclusion, we call on the international community and the active civil establishments to redouble their efforts and coordinate their work in order to build a more human world, a world where the values of tolerance and love and peace will dominate and prevail.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Iran): I am pleased to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 of this important document, encompassing a wide range of rights, though certainly not all, was an historic turning point in the promotion of human rights. The influence of the Declaration has since been profound and extensive. Its ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want and its emphasis on human dignity and value have for decades guided our collective endeavours for the protection and promotion of human rights. Most significantly, it has set the tone for further norm-setting and the development of human rights law.

Coming in the wake of the abhorrent ruthlessness and hideous atrocities committed on grand scale before and during the Second World War, the primary attention of the Declaration was given to civil and political rights. While the positive influence of these norms in promoting and solidifying the civil and political rights of individuals and ensuring their observance can hardly be denied, the elaboration of economic, social and cultural rights was neglected. It was only with the entry into force in 1976 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that those rights were addressed. Another important aspect — the question of cultural diversity — still had to wait.

It was not until the 1993 Vienna Conference that the international community was able to affirm the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights on the same footing and with the same emphasis. It was only there and then that the community of States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed the right to development as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights.

Moreover, in Vienna the importance of cultural diversity was also recognized — quite a welcome development and another step in the right direction. The fact of the matter is that global pluralism and cultural diversity on the one hand and the universality of human rights on the other are not contradictory; rather, they are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the ultimate objective of international human rights instruments is not to impose artificial uniformity on human beings, whose identities lie in their cultural, religious and historical backgrounds and values. Tolerance means respect for diversity, not its suppression in the name of universality.

To conclude, let me reiterate that, at the threshold of the new millennium and the new century, with all that it implies and entails, the Declaration does not need to be rewritten. Rather, every effort should be made to arrive at a more profound and comprehensive common understanding of its provisions. The recent initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights in seeking an Islamic commentary on the Universal Declaration is a positive and commendable step in the right direction. To face the formidable challenges ahead of us all, we need goodwill, open minds and hearts, flexibility, far-sightedness and, certainly, genuine dialogue among nations and civilizations.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Galuška (Czech Republic): As we meet here to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we look back and recapitulate not only the reasons for and circumstances of its birth but, primarily, the developments in the 50 years that followed. Sparked by the Declaration, endeavours to promote and develop human rights have generated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, followed by a wide spectrum of human rights instruments adopted since the 1960s.

For the international community, the driving purpose has been to guarantee for each individual the basic aspects of his or her social existence. However, in the real world, the effectiveness of safeguards for noble values such as honour, dignity, personal liberty and equality is still open to question. Many of those internationally recognized and guaranteed instruments have been deplorably blunted by the reservations of States parties, intended to accommodate different national laws. In this context, the credit should go to the international community for seeking to realize human rights to the maximum extent and, above all, to human rights activists for their unfailing efforts to promote human rights in everyday life.

The Czech Government has recently appointed, as a part of its strategy for the more effective fulfilment of international commitments in the human rights area, a Government Representative for Human Rights. This institutional change will shortly be followed by new legislation designed to deepen and reinforce human rights protection and secure full compliance with international obligations.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration has been well publicized in the Czech Republic. To mark this event, the United Nations Information Centre and the publicly funded media and civic associations have initiated numerous exhibitions, symposiums, concerts and conferences.

Earlier this year, the Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted in Rome, having jurisdiction over the most heinous international crimes in particular genocide and other crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is gratifying and, indeed, highly symbolic that the international community took this step of truly historic significance during the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Putting an end to the impunity of individuals responsible for the most egregious violations of human rights will certainly be instrumental in deterring the commission of such crimes in the future, thus contributing to upholding respect for human rights worldwide and to making the world a better, more just and safer place to live for generations to come.

The Czech Republic is at present completing, as a matter of priority, the respective domestic procedures with a view to becoming a signatory of the Rome Statute in the near future. We intend to continue to work hard towards achieving the establishment of an operational, effective and independent Court, at the domestic level by taking up the various actions required for ratification of the Statute, and through our active participation in the work of the Preparatory Commission.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that the efforts for the better implementation of indivisible, universal human rights will meet with the increasingly strong response of the global community.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): Fifty years ago this day, the General Assembly, at its third session, meeting at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am pleased to state that, by drawing lots, Myanmar was the first country to vote in favour of the Declaration at that session.

With that historic act of the General Assembly, we started the long and arduous process of safeguarding human dignity in earnest. The Declaration set a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations and became a moral force compelling the Member States to abide by the norms enshrined in it. Conscious of the horrible ways in which fundamental human rights and freedoms had been trampled and violated during the Second World War and resolved to put an end to the kind of atrocities that had outraged the conscience of humankind in that war, the far-sighted and visionary framers of the Declaration set in it values and norms shared by all cultures and societies and valid for all time.

For the last 50 years, the Declaration has remained a basic source of inspiration for all national, regional and international efforts to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms. Looking over the long journey we have made in those 50 years, we can detect that the universal and lasting principles of the Declaration have greatly influenced our thinking on matters concerning human rights. The International Covenants on Human Rights derived their strength from the Declaration. The language of the two Covenants reveals the common source of their inspiration. Similarly, the domestic legislation of many countries has been inspired by the Declaration.

Over the last five decades, the numerous declarations and resolutions of the United Nations and the regional conventions on human rights have drawn on the Declaration in spirit, as well as in language, in setting out various rights of the people. In the framework of the United Nations alone, a comprehensive body of human rights standards has been elaborated in more than 60 declarations, conventions and protocols concerning specific human rights issues. Furthermore, there are human rights instruments prepared outside the United Nations system, such as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1969 American Convention on Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981. Together, all these instruments further developed the fundamental principles enshrined in the Declaration. Similarly, in 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, reiterated the lasting value of those principles.

As we draw closer to the end of the millennium, we are encouraged to observe that, guided by the spirit of the Declaration, the international community has made remarkable achievements in its endeavours for the promotion and protection of human rights.

As is clearly visible to all, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has successfully stood the test of time as a living document. As the years have passed, it has gained in status and the grand sweep of its noble spirit has widened. We believe that the bright light shed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in humankind's efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights will continue to illuminate our future path towards the common goal.

While a large number of countries have been successful in realizing, to a considerable extent, the ideals enshrined in the Declaration, others are still striving to translate the ideals into action compatible with their particular political, social and economic situations. To help such countries achieve the ideals we all aspire to, it is essential for the international community to treat human rights in a fair, understanding and constructive spirit. The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the most opportune moment to renew our commitment to continue to strive constructively towards the "common standard of achievement" set by the Declaration.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Mr. Erdös (Hungary) *(interpretation from French)*: Hungary associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative Austria on behalf of the European Union.

This debate in the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has spectacularly highlighted the attachment of each and every member of the international community to the values enshrined in the Declaration.

And yet, examples of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are rife. Violations are committed on all continents. Most of the tensions, crises and conflicts that we witness are caused first and foremost by situations that have their source in serious violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and in overt or covert attempts to deprave democracy.

The necessary conclusion, despite the considerable progress achieved in this field and the expressions of belief in the dignity and freedom of the individual, is that there is still a great deal for all of us to do before rule of law and respect for human rights prevail on earth.

The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, reaffirmed the universal character of these rights and freedoms over and above particular national and regional characteristics and reconfirmed defence of human rights as a legitimate concern of the international community.

The spirit and the content of the Universal Declaration played a decisive part in the intellectual preparation for the profound changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe 10 years ago and contributed significantly to the crumbling of totalitarian systems and the flourishing of democratic transition. In this regard, a unique event of recent decades in Hungary was the setting to music of the Universal Declaration. This was done in the 1970s by a very popular group, and it was recorded and put on sale. This courageous deed met with resounding success and rightly so.

An important process that is now developing in Europe is the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic structures. The requirement of full respect and protection for human rights in countries that wish to join is the result of the very essence and nature of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. The force of attraction of this integrative process has a notable positive effect on the functioning of democratic mechanisms in the countries that are knocking at the door of those institutions. Furthermore, we believe that the accession of those countries to the integrating structures cannot but give further impetus to the complete implementation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration.

Hungary will be in a position to contribute very specifically to the implementation of human rights in the world during its current chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe — the Council of Europe, an organization that has done much, even during the world's period of bipolarity, to implement human rights, including those of national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. Suffice it to recall in this regard that today no one in Europe or elsewhere has any doubts about the fundamental importance of respect for minority rights in the preservation of peace and stability within our societies.

The objectives of the Hungarian chairmanship, include improving the effectiveness of the system of verification of obligations undertaken in the field of human rights — an objective whose importance clearly extends beyond the framework of the Council of Europe. During our presidency mandate, the Council of Europe plans to establish a European human rights court.

The principles that underpin the Universal Declaration have remained valid through decades of turbulence and will undoubtedly, at this age of globalization, remain a source of inspiration and guidance for the international community in its quest for justice and equal rights for all and in the activities that we hope will effectively defend those rights in their entirety.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Sergiwa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) *(interpretation from Arabic):* Our commemoration today of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights demonstrates the international community's interest in promoting and respecting human rights.

The Declaration came into being after the peoples of the United Nations confirmed in the Charter their belief in the rights and dignity of man. Its articles deal with equality in rights and dignity among all the members of the human race. It urged them to treat each other in a spirit of amity and brotherhood.

The Declaration has become a solid foundation for the international community to conclude a series of important instruments, among them the two International Covenants on Human Rights that deal in detail with all human rights — economic, social, cultural, political and civil.

While we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations in reinforcing and promoting respect for human rights, and while we pay tribute to the results of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, which confirmed the interrelated nature of human rights and fundamental freedoms and recognized the cultural, religious and historical particularities of States and peoples by establishing non-selective, neutral and objective guiding principles for dealing with issues of human rights, we cannot overlook the gross violations of human rights that are carried out in full view of the international community in many parts of the world, least of all those that take the form of genocide, the murder of innocent people and the displacement of women and children, such as those committed against the Palestinian people. That people continue to be the victim of the most horrendous practices of torture, detention and displacement. It is denied its right to self-determination and to establish an independent State of its own. Those violations have been all the worse because certain countries have politicized human rights issues and have engaged in selective policies to promote their own vested interests.

Thus, we have not yet achieved our common goal of protecting human rights by dealing with this humanitarian issue in an objective manner based first and foremost on effective cooperation founded on constructive dialogue and cooperation among States and on the elimination of obstacles to the right to development. Our position is based on a belief that human rights does not mean only freedom from torture and persecution, freedom of thought and freedom to participate in governance. It also means freedom from hunger, poverty and disease, in a way that takes into account all the national, cultural and religious characteristics of every people so that the issue remains a purely humanitarian one.

My country has made continuous efforts in the field of strengthening and promoting human rights. These are reflected in the Declaration on the Establishment of the Authority of the People in the publication of the *Green Book*, in the primacy of the masses, in our accession to and respect for most international human rights instruments, and in the annual presentation of the Qadhafi Human Rights Award to all those who have done exceptional work to promote human rights and to advocate freedom anywhere in the world.

Despite all those efforts, we encounter many obstacles because of gross violations of the right of the Libyan people to development, to freedom of movement, to medical treatment and to practice their religion. These are a result of the air embargo, the coercive economic measures, the economic siege and the freezing of bank accounts. They result from unfair Security Council resolutions and from unilateral coercive measures.

On this great occasion, as we commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we hope that the United Nations will address the negative effects of the coercive sanctions imposed on the Libyan people, whose only sins are its refusal to capitulate to hegemony and its determination to live in freedom on its own soil.

We hope that on this occasion the international community will see fit to assess the progress achieved in the strengthening and promotion of human rights, and to identify obstacles to the genuine enjoyment of human rights by all peoples. We affirm our intention to redouble our efforts to observe the provisions of the Universal Declaration and of all other relevant human rights instruments.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Botnaru (Moldova): The standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have stood the test of time and remain as valid today as they were a half-century ago. The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration will give new impetus to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world. The Republic of Moldova highly appreciates the activities of United Nations human rights bodies and fully supports the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The promotion and protection of human rights is first and foremost a national responsibility. My Government attaches great importance to human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this respect, since our declaration of independence, all elections in my country, including the parliamentary elections held this year, which took place on a multi-party basis, have been free and fair. The new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova guarantees full human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including national minorities.

The national parliament has adopted more than 20 laws dealing expressly with human rights. Respect for and protection of human rights in my country is also safeguarded by the Constitutional Court, which, by the principles of the separation of powers and of the responsibility of the State towards its citizens, has the final say on the Constitution. The Republic of Moldova has acceded to the main international legal instruments on human rights adopted within the framework of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and is continuing this process.

Despite all the difficulties of transition and the negative effects of the international economic and financial crisis, my Government spares no effort in implementing human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the consolidation of human rights institutions. Unfortunately, the process of democratization in the Republic of Moldova is affected by the actions of the separatist regime in the eastern region, which violates the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the population. In spite of many appeals by international human rights organizations, the members of the Ilascu group, convicted and sent to prison illegally six years ago, have not yet been released. Nevertheless, my Government continues to undertake supplementary efforts to enable each citizen of the entire country to seize, defend, promote, understand and insist on his or her human rights.

Fifty years of history shows us that the process of the implementation of the principles of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights is still not an easy one. As we approach the new millennium, we have to recognize that violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are still taking place in many parts of the world. No less important than the fundamental freedoms of thought, opinion, expression and belief are economic, social and cultural rights and the right to equal opportunity. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson, and many other people have said, economic and social rights must be treated with the same priority as civil and political rights. This is extremely relevant for countries with economies in transition.

The Republic of Moldova, as a newly independent State, was unable to participate in the process of drafting and adopting the Universal Declaration. We understand that our commitment to safeguard and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, first of all at home, and to help those who still do not have the opportunity to enjoy them will be our contribution towards this unique and noble goal.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm on the solemn occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the strong commitment of the Republic of Moldova to this cause and its determination to collaborate fully with all United Nations bodies in the implementation of respect for life, liberty, justice and equality in our still imperfect world.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): It is hard to be brief when talking about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for its role in the defense of the ideals it proclaimed in the modern world is too significant. It was the first international instrument in history to have universal significance in the field of human rights, emphasizing as it did the need to respect fully basic individual rights, democratic rights and freedoms for all, as well as listing such rights and freedoms. The adoption of the Declaration became the starting point for a series of international legal instruments that defined the obligations of participating States to ensure concrete rights and freedoms.

The belief in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and value of the individual, which survived in the trenches under the bombs and gunfire of the Second World War and behind the barbed wire of concentration camps, turned out to be stronger than dividing lines and ideological taboos. However, despite the fact that colonialism and bloc confrontation are things of the past, and while the frontiers of democracy have been expanded, one can hardly believe that the world is free when children are starving, refugee life is an ordeal, human lives and destinies are shattered in armed conflicts, and ignorance more than any form of censorship prevents people from knowing that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." *(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 1)*

The theme of today's anniversary celebration, "All human rights for all", means that the Universal Declaration should not be read selectively or interpreted with bias. Similarly, it seems doubtful that democratic freedoms could be "encouraged" by indefinite economic sanctions and unilateral coercive measures. It is difficult to talk about universal justice when human dignity is determined by the ethnic origin of the person.

The Russian people have openly and fearlessly defended their right to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the preparation of which our country played an active role. We have set out on the road of building a democratic society in which human rights are one of the main priorities on the Government's agenda. Today's realities in Russia include democratic elections, political pluralism, freedom of expression, independent mass media and growth of the self-awareness of the civil society.

By order of the President of the Russian Federation, the year 1998 was declared the Year of Human Rights in Russia. Under the aegis of the Year, a number of important events took place in Russia — for example, the Federal Assembly ratified the basic conventions of the Council of Europe; the ombudsman for human rights was elected and the penitentiary system was transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. Currently, the preparation of the presidential programme of action in the field of human rights is approaching its final stage.

The appeals of the United Nations General Assembly to increase awareness about the rights proclaimed in the Declaration and other international instruments in the field of human rights found support in Russia not only on the part of Government bodies, but also within a number of regional initiatives. These include in particular the international conference on human rights and ways of implementing them, which was held last October in Saratov. The organization of such conferences in Russian regions allows for an opportunity to look at the human rights problem not only from the capital city, but also from those unbounded expanses that are Russia.

The Universal Declaration proclaimed that human rights should be protected by law. This principle lays the foundation for the activities of the Federal Assembly of Russia aimed at improving the national legislation on human rights and its adaptation to universal human rights standards. Inter-parliamentary cooperation makes an important contribution to this process. The one-hundredth Inter-Parliamentary Conference, held in Moscow in September this year was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration and appealed to national parliaments to strongly encourage and protect all human rights in the twenty-first century.

Despite current difficulties, Russia confirms its commitment to socially oriented market reforms, the principles of democracy and the protection of human rights and freedoms in order to achieve a genuine improvement in the quality of life for the Russian people. These are now the priority issues for the Russian Government.

Many solemn and nice words have been and will be said about the importance of the Universal Declaration. The main thing is that, having said those words, we should not forget that this instrument was adopted not for the celebration of anniversaries but for providing real protection to individuals in everyday life.

The Acting President: I invite the representative of Sri Lanka to make his statement.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): I am honoured to be able to speak in the General Assembly today on behalf of Sri Lanka.

The relationship between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations is close. The Charter of the United Nations, adopted in 1945, sought to make relations between States far better than they were. The Universal Declaration, adopted three years later, reminded the world that the individual, too, was worthy of attention in relations between States and worthy of care and dignity in national jurisdictions. The Universal Declaration set out what the world should regard as the substantive core of human rights. The United Nations took the message of the Declaration to all regions and all countries.

Concern for human rights is high on Sri Lanka's national and international agenda and will always continue to be so. Much has been done in Sri Lanka to promote awareness of and to ensure protection for human rights, and much more will certainly continue to be done. National and community leaders in towns and villages now teach that the rights of the individual begin at home — in the family unit and in the immediate environment around one — and that in respecting the rights of those close to one there will be movement towards the observance and the protection of the human rights of all.

At the international level, Sri Lanka's participation is substantial in human rights treaties and in the implementation of the obligations under those treaties. A party to the two International Covenants, Sri Lanka is among the parties to the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its particularly demanding provisions.

We really do believe that our record is a heartening one whose central theme is that of uniting all the people of Sri Lanka in the democratic processes of the country.

Sri Lanka wholeheartedly supports the central role of the United Nations in the field of human rights. We are concerned, however, that amidst the poverty around us, the United Nations is slow in according the imprimatur of human rights to such collective rights as the right to development. We are concerned as well that the violation of human rights by entities other than governmental entities do not always receive the condemnation they deserve from those in positions of international influence and authority in the field of human rights.

We recognize, of course, that in relations between States the world is in continuous evolution and that there will also be a continuous evolution in the position of the individual in society. We know that in the continuity of evolution there will be exceptional years of great advances. There will also be depressing years of great regressions when the scale of violations of human rights, as in recent years, reaches the magnitude of crimes against humanity and gives rise to global yearnings for international criminal tribunals.

If the record of the last 50 years is not entirely encouraging, let us hope that the next 50 years will be more humane. Let us build on the unquestionable contemporary premise that many of the most effective endeavours that could be made towards universal observance of human rights lie well within the national jurisdictions of States and touch some of the most important aspects of life within national societies. Considered in this perspective, it seems possible that we may eventually conclude that there may be limitations to the effectiveness of international treaties and their legal obligations and that it is now time to return to the language of the initial proclamatory paragraph of the Universal Declaration, to the enunciation of standards of achievement, to the language of exhortation, to the language of religious leaders, to discourse and to dialogue.

The Acting President: I invite the representative of the Solomon Islands to make his statement.

Mr. Horoi (Solomon Islands): From the perspective of 50 years of United Nations history, the General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may appear to be something of a miracle. Proposals to include a bill of rights in the draft Charter of the United Nations were offered at the San Francisco Conference but were deferred until the Organization came into being. The Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly created the Declaration in less than three years of work, an extraordinary achievement. As several delegations said during the final hours of debate in the General Assembly, however, the Declaration was but a compromise, the best that could be obtained at the time. It was a splendid compromise, and Solomon Islands joins the international community in this fiftieth anniversary commemoration and pledges its never-ending commitment to the letter and spirit of the Declaration.

Our celebration here must be a sober one, for as we speak, hundreds of millions of people are being denied their fundamental rights. Poverty, which deprives over a billion people of many of those rights, remains a monumental challenge. For those who lack sufficient food, decent housing, safe water and sanitation, and access to education, it is a continuing struggle to maintain human dignity. Nor is there human dignity for those who are discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnic origin or gender. The complex economic, political and social factors that generate poverty and permit it to continue must be effectively addressed.

Children and adults caught in situations of armed conflict suffer violations of their basic rights and freedoms, while those who commit the offenses escape accountability. Solomon Islands views the International Criminal Court as a significant step towards bringing to justice those who perpetrate these acts against humanity. I had the honour of signing the Statute on behalf of my Government earlier this week, and the process of ratification by Solomon Islands will soon be under way.

The state of a country's economic development and progress will affect the degree to which the fundamental rights of the people are met. Least developed countries such as Solomon Islands struggle with the provision of a number of these rights. International cooperation to assist these countries to realize their right to development is essential and must be a significant component of the global human rights programme. Moreover, technical assistance to help us fulfil the reporting requirements of human rights conventions is needed.

The protection and fostering of human rights begins at home. My country's national Constitution embraces the people's basic rights, and my Government, like its predecessors, continues working to realize them. The geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity of Solomon Islands poses unique challenges to this effort. A country of over 900 islands and more than 80 indigenous languages and dialects is challenging indeed. Solomon Islands society is based on the extended family, whose collective rights have long been recognized. The rights of the individual traditionally have been protected in the context of the extended family. We are largely a village society where the people live in a subsistence economy in which the extended family provides the individual with basic necessities. Understandably, a high value is placed on the protection of the family's collective rights.

In a land tenure system where the clan as a whole is custodian, an analysis of the rights of the individual is complex. Here the issues are not only basic rights but the extent to which the individual can enjoy those rights in using the land and benefiting from its resources. Internal and external changes are making this a critical challenge to our society. The relationships between the individual, the family and the environment, in fact, bring profound issues to the implementation of human rights in the Solomon Islands.

We cannot afford to use culture or family as excuses for inaction in the field of human rights. Instead, we should employ these concepts as the threshold for questioning and formulating strategies to ensure that individuals and groups in our societies are accorded all of their human rights. Mutual understanding of and respect for the cultural diversities of our societies will strengthen the national and international human rights systems. A holistic approach to human rights is essential for the people of Solomon Islands.

In societies like that of Solomon Islands, the interaction between the rights and obligations of the individual and the extended family must be recognized and monitored with sensitivity. The social changes taking place require it.

Efforts to achieve the universality of human rights begin in our communities. These initiatives should take into account the unique situation of our people and our society. Solomon Islands is committed to this necessary and noble endeavour.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Al-Dosari (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At a time when my country must congratulate the international community on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Bahrain cannot but pay tribute to the important role played by our Organization in the dissemination of these values and principles throughout the United Nations system — the General Assembly and its Committees, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, in particular the Commission on Human Rights, and other relevant mechanisms, most particularly the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In view of the fact that the Islamic religion bases itself on the principle of equality and interdependence among all human beings, whatever their race, and the principle of tolerance as a foundation for human relations, Bahrain is convinced that the Declaration is one of the basic pillars of international law by which we should be guided in our promotion of human rights.

Thus Bahrain's commitment to the Declaration is rooted in our deepest conviction as to the values and principles promoted by the tolerant Islamic sharia, which is reflected in this Declaration. Bahrain is convinced that the necessary efforts to implement the principles of the Declaration must be accompanied by a guarantee of all humanitarian principles, such as the fundamental right to a life in conditions of dignity and particularly security and stability within society in the areas of employment, housing, health care and education.

My country has come a long way as regards sustainable development and the creation of a society that is developing from an economic, social and cultural perspective. This is clear from the reports — particularly the *Human Development Report* — published annually by the United Nations Development Programme. Bahrain has for the third consecutive year been listed as an advanced country as regards human development.

Bahrain's commitment to the spirit that animates the Universal Declaration has enabled it to concentrate its efforts on guaranteeing freedom and dignity for all of our citizens, in line with their cultural and social status and on the basis of equality, without imposing any ideas or ideals, political or otherwise, that would be dissonant with the environment of the Bahraini citizen. Inspired by the tolerant Islamic sharia in this respect, my country would like to stress the importance of respect for religious and cultural preferences and the social customs and mores of States and societies.

We are convinced that the States Members of the United Nations should work together to bring about a greater degree of understanding and to reduce the differences of opinion as regards human concepts that exist in different societies. On 4 November 1998, we adopted resolution 53/22, entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", which we think is an important step towards the promotion of dialogue in this field.

My country is convinced that cooperation among States can be based only on dialogue and coexistence among different cultures in order to enable the different perspectives to converge in a practical manner, building trust and confidence among States and establishing peace and stability. My country is entirely prepared to contribute to bringing about such cooperation in order to better implement the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on this, its fiftieth anniversary.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Cameroon.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*interpretation from French*): After the plea for human dignity given here on 30 September 1998 by Mr. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Cameroon is eager to intervene once again in this debate in order to show its gratitude, renew its commitment and express its confidence.

First of all, Cameroon would like to express its gratitude to those who, because they were bruised in body and spirit by barbarous attacks on human beings and their dignity, crafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This hymn to hope remains one of the highest and most accomplished expressions of human conscience in the twentieth century. In it the peoples of Cameroon have found inspiration, courage, strength and determination in their struggle for liberty, dignity and full participation in the life of international society.

Tribute must be paid to the United Nations, which since it was established has made the promotion and protection of human rights a main concern. Thanks to the Organization and under its auspices, various international covenants and other conventions have been adopted in order to increase the force of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to expand its scope.

Remarkable progress has been achieved, and we have every reason to be proud of this. We must all note, however, that millions of human beings are still ravaged by hunger and malnutrition, that our century continues to witness serious violations of fundamental human rights and that disturbing trends are emerging. Thus, there are those who would like to promote and defend a single right or a single category of rights. Also, human rights are used more and more often for blackmail and to apply all kinds of pressure. Nonetheless, since we have subscribed to the Declaration, we all know that human rights are universal, interdependent and indissociable. There is a gap between the agreed letter of the texts and the spirit that today is still far from being respected in real life.

The fiftieth anniversary should awake in us a collective will and determination to build a better future. Today we must plant the seeds of more humane and neighbourly tomorrows. In this spirit, Cameroon would like to renew *hic et nunc* its fidelity to human rights and its commitment to promoting them.

Evidence of this fidelity is the inauguration yesterday in Yaoundé of a square and a bluestone stela dedicated to human rights. This monument lies at the foot of the avenue named after Jean-Paul II, the indefatigable defender of human rights. What a coincidence — a unified symbol, a unified message.

Additional evidence of this fidelity is Cameroon's signing of the Statute of the International Criminal Court on the very day it was adopted in Rome. From this commitment came the policy devised and, since 1982, implemented systematically and with determination by Mr. E.M. Paul Biya, President of the Republic, designed to inculcate the rule of law and democracy in public life, so that Cameroon will forever be a law-abiding State and an enlightened defender of individual human dignity.

If this is truly to come to pass, the participation of every citizen is essential. Thus we have particularly stressed the diffusion and popularization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among all social strata, and especially among the youth — the Cameroon of the future. The goal is to establish in hearts and minds, on the one hand, the democratic culture without which there is no democracy, and on the other hand, that tolerance — that acceptance of the other and of diversity and of differences — the very basis for human rights and the *sine qua non* for their respect.

Let us not forget; intolerance, negation of the other and the refusal to accept diversity and differences are the source of the atrocities that humanity has experienced and which, unfortunately, it continues to experience.

Cameroon would like to express its confidence that the United Nations, its Member States and civil society can make the third millennium the millennium for the realization of human rights, and thus the millennium of human dignity. We can do this. We must do it by fighting on two fronts: to establish throughout the world democratic regimes and the rule of law which are guarantors of respect for human rights, and also to eradicate poverty, which today most undermines human dignity. This requires an acute sense of partnership, solidarity and self-sacrifice. This is how we will be able to build during the coming century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of human beings.

Thereby we will have paved the way for a new springtime for the human spirit and given full meaning to the expression, "We, the peoples of the United Nations" — an expression that speaks eloquently of mutual trust, security and solidarity.

The Acting President: I call now on the representative of Armenia.

Ms. Aghadjanian (Armenia): For the international community this is the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the adoption of which undoubtedly constitutes one of the major events in human history. The fact that at this moment the attention of the global community is focused on this debate is clear evidence that, more than in any previous time in the history of mankind, the global community today concentrates on the issue of the promotion and protection of human rights.

We realize that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are of a universal nature and are a birthright of all human beings. Moreover — stressing that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing — Armenia especially welcomes the increasing attention that is being paid to economic, social and cultural rights, alongside the civil and political ones.

One of the main challenges for the protection and promotion of human rights remains their implementation at the national level. Addressing this issue in individual countries in a balanced and cooperative way has proved to be a constructive method for the implementation of human rights on the international level.

The President took the Chair.

With this in mind, ever since independence, Armenia has been making a consistent effort to bring its national legislation into compliance with international norms and standards, particularly in the field of human rights. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime Armenia has taken the path of democracy, and it decisively strives to create a democratic society. In the first years after independence, Armenia has acceded to all six core human rights treaties and has done this without reservation.

The Human Rights Year coincided with a new stage of democratic development in Armenia. In March, the President of Armenia established a presidential commission on human rights, which, in fact, is a transitional institution for the period preceding the completion of the legal framework necessary to set up the institution of ombudsman.

The Universal Declaration created a solid foundation for further action and initiatives by the United Nations and other interested international bodies, as well as by the States and national organizations concerned. Since 1948, the United Nations system has made substantial progress in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide. However, much remains to be done, and this anniversary has become an appropriate occasion to reaffirm the principles adopted 50 years ago and to define new ways and means for their implementation, especially taking into account the new structure of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner's new mandate and role.

When we speak of human rights, we speak of tolerance, understanding, compassion for the human condition, and we speak of the rule of law and good governance, a requirement which applies to all nations and Governments.

I would like to conclude by recalling once more that the United Nations is the United Nations of "We, the people", not "We, the Governments", and therefore it is called upon to protect the rights of individuals and individuals themselves. Armenia strongly believes that human rights can and will become the common language of mankind and that the commitment to human rights will bind people together and guide the peoples and Governments in their relationship in the new millennium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Priedkalns (Latvia): First of all, I should like to extend my sincere congratulations to the winners of the Human Rights Prizes. These awards honour the courage, commitment and dedication of a very large number of persons and organizations who have worked for the advancement and enrichment of the dignity of humankind.

In this statement, Latvia has aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by our Austrian colleague.

Human Rights Day this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Men and women around the world have found inspiration in the principles embodied in the document. They have found an enduring relevance of those principles to the realization in their lives of justice, freedom and spiritual wealth. They have found a genuine universality in that the principles cherish the rights of all people and that they are embedded in the spirit of each member of the human family.

The Declaration is one of the most significant documents of the twentieth century. It is based on a fundamental premise that human rights do not belong to any one civilization, nation or system of thought, but that they are truly universal, indivisible and interdependent. The implementation of the principles of the Declaration is an essential prerequisite for the realization of political and economic rights, for the attainment of the stability of democratic institutions and for a fair distribution of the wealth of humankind.

The Universal Declaration serves as the foundation of an international system for the effective protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Fifty years ago the Declaration established a set of principles which have inspired the authors of international instruments on human rights. Numerous institutions for the defence of human rights have come into existence as a result of these documents, including in my country, Latvia.

At the time of the adoption of the Declaration, Latvia was under foreign occupation. The occupying Power violated human rights on a massive scale but, paradoxically, at the same time participated in the adoption of the Declaration. Only three and a half months after the adoption, the occupying Power carried out mass deportation of Latvian people to hard labour camps where many of them died.

Some decades later, the United Nations institutions for the protection of human rights became known in Latvia. Expression of opposition to the occupying Power more and more frequently relied upon United Nations human rights documents. Since the restoration of independence, Latvia has committed itself to the protection and promotion of human rights for all people of Latvia and for their social integration.

Today, Latvia supports the incorporation of human rights objectives into all aspects of United Nations work. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is the primary mechanism for that purpose. Promotion and support of national human rights institutions must remain a part of the human rights programmes of that Office. As a newly elected member of the Commission on Human Rights, Latvia believes that universal respect for human rights should continue to be a priority objective of the United Nations system, also requiring an increased allocation of resources.

Human rights are linked to human responsibilities. In this light, Latvia believes that the establishment of the International Criminal Court is a major accomplishment and welcomes the support expressed for the Court by a growing number of States. This summer, Latvia's Foreign Minister, Valdis Birkavs, as Vice-President of the Conference, stated that Latvia, as a State which has itself suffered from unlawful regimes in the past, is morally and juridically obliged to strive that the United Nations further develop the means at its disposal to ward off aggressors and dissuade potential perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

On this significant anniversary, let all peoples of the world renew their resolve to work together, striving for a secure, just and peaceful world, a world where the inherent dignity of the human person is recognized, where peace is linked with justice and privilege with responsibility, a world with equal opportunity for civil and political rights, for social and economic development and for cultural diversity enjoyed by all.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Samoa.

Ms. Solofa (Samoa): For the first time in history, by the Charter of this Organization, the peoples of the United Nations reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small. Reaffirmation in 1945 was an important and momentous acknowledgement of the inherent rights and natural condition of the human person, of the rights which had always been. The public elaboration of the content of the Charter regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the other international human rights instruments stands today among the truly great achievements of this Organization.

The impact of the Universal Declaration has been influential and cosmic. It has spawned treaties and inspired national constitutional provisions, among them the constitution of my own country. While at the time of its adoption in 1948 it was a Declaration without force of law, it has since had a powerful influence on the development of contemporary international law. Fifty years on, there is wide acknowledgement that the Universal Declaration has generated binding norms, their universality undeniable.

As we gather at this fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we contrast the world of 1998 with that of 1948 when, at the time of adoption, the General Assembly consisted of 58 Member States — not the broadly representative United Nations General Assembly of today. Yet, with the global order now so fundamentally different, the Universal Declaration of today stands no longer as a document of doubt or opposition, but as a tested and validly reliable reflection of the evolving global consensus on the norms of decent human conduct by which the international community can judge the behaviour of States, and by which States themselves desire to be judged.

It is right that we pay tribute to the many important achievements of the past 50 years. International awareness of human rights has never been as great as it is today. The worldwide engagement of non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations has given a special measure of strength and depth of commitment.

At the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, the universality and indivisibility of human rights were proclaimed anew and reaffirmed yet again. That too, especially with the moving, often eloquent participation of ordinary citizens and civil society, was a remarkable occasion. But it was as critical then as it is today to make a choice, for it was no longer sufficient to accept the mere expression of the goodwill of States to fulfil human rights demands. Concrete steps for implementation, a solemn obligation of all States, were the order of the day, and the failure to take them was a legitimate concern of the whole international community.

Human rights and freedoms are the essential ingredients of democracy. The core principle that sustains them — justice — can best flourish under democracy. My Government believes deeply, at least for our own country, that human rights and freedoms are best nurtured in the context of our culture and traditions.

Our celebration of this day carries the recognition that human rights lie at the heart of all that the United Nations aspires to achieve in peace and development. It is fitting that we salute all who have fallen and all who continue to carry the banner in the cause of human rights. May I say in this connection that my Government supports fully the work of the High Commissioner and, in particular, her call for a rights-based approach to development, as well as for empowering people to demand justice as a right.

But all is not well. We know from the recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that systematic and massive violations of human rights continue to dominate the international agenda. Poverty worldwide is persistent and disturbing; the calculated slaughter and ethnic cleansing of peoples and cultures are at their most offensive. That they take place is an indictment of us all, a critical test of the sincerity of words and the determination of actions which this Organization and its entire membership must take.

An earlier generation proclaimed the Universal Declaration, giving light and inspiration. As we move on, as we must, towards a finer vision of humanity, we realize that at issue is what human beings need and what they treasure most: fundamental justice. That, as we have been reminded, is irreducible.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Haiti.

Mr. Lelong (Haiti) (*interpretation from French*): In submitting to the General Assembly at its third session the draft universal declaration of human rights, the representative of Haiti, Senator Emile St.-Lôt, in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Third Committee, recalled how, some eight years earlier, we had had to defend our ancient civilization and resist unbridled barbarism behind a rampart of energy, will and heart. It was, he added, the sanest and most noble of crusades, that of men of all races, all colours, all languages and all religions in defence of their freedom and the rights inherent in their dignity as individuals.

The Commission on Human Rights, established by a decision of the Economic and Social Council and the Third Committee, drafted a document in the framework of the two contradictory concepts of the age, seeking to harmonize the ineluctable needs for human freedom with the imperatives of justice and social solidarity. This Declaration, whose fiftieth anniversary we are commemorating today, represented the greatest joint effort ever undertaken by humanity to lay down new foundations of law and morality based on liberty, equality and fraternity.

For those who, like us Haitians, are offshoots of the African tree transplanted in America, this commemoration recalls to memory and consciousness the bitter experience of the great violation of human rights perpetrated in Africa and America for more than two centuries, the afflictions of which continue to this day. The Haitian revolution, having been the first to proclaim the abolition of slavery in 1794 and to universalize the democratic principles of 1789, which until then had been beyond the reach of blacks, was testimony to the exceptional precocity of the vision of Toussaint Louverture and a distant precursor of the Declaration.

Without attempting to summarize the road travelled since 1948, we must recognize with satisfaction that minds the world over are today steeped in awareness of human rights; that the dissemination and acceptance of those rights are growing day by day; that the constituency of totalitarianism is gradually shrinking; that justice is growing stronger, particularly with the progressive development of international tribunals whose impartiality must be able to withstand every test; and that the protection of women and children, minorities and diminished majorities is the object of a collective commitment.

We also wish solemnly to recall on this occasion the fundamental importance of the right to development, without which traditional rights lose their meaning and effectiveness. Nonetheless, we must also clearly mark the road to follow in defence of human rights, which is a collective duty, monopolized by no one, non-politicized and strictly impartial.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not turned our universe into paradise. Despite the progress achieved, the increasing tragedies and the escalation of massive and systematic violations are brutal reminders of the ease and frequency with which the noble ideal of defending human rights can be compromised.

These disappointing outbursts of savage reality must not crush us. In our opinion, that is the deeper meaning of this commemoration: to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to making real what is still today a mere promise to the humble and wounded of the world.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be the common ideal for which all peoples and nations should strive. This commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration enables States to report progress made in the implementation of this Declaration, against the background of the struggle against naziism and fascism. The Universal Declaration has become the cornerstone in the efforts to guarantee human rights.

The State of Qatar attaches major importance to the question of human rights. In a statement he made on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, His Highness Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of Qatar, announced that the State of Qatar has continued to develop its legislation in defence of democratic public freedoms. He stated, *inter alia*, that the State of Qatar confirms its appreciation of the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system and agencies in this regard and affirms its own commitment to ensuring rights and duties, laying the foundation for justice, supporting democracy and providing a decent standard of living for citizens and resident expatriates alike through its continued efforts to develop its legislation and laws and to modernize the procedure in force.

Moreover, in conformity with the State's approach of emphasizing its unswerving commitment to human rights on all international, regional and local occasions, and in line with its eagerness to embrace anything that might enhance that approach, it stresses its profound interest in all the resolutions of the United Nations and international organizations relevant to human rights and that it upholds effectively and responsibly the spirit and provisions of that historic Declaration and other human rights instruments adopted since 1948.

His Highness the Prime Minister also stressed that the State of Qatar supports all resolutions aimed at providing more human, social, legal and economic rights. His Highness also stressed Qatar's humanitarian and social role in international problems, crises and catastrophes that take place in various parts of the world, in fulfilment of its international obligations and in conformity with the principles of our great Islamic religion and our moral values and in the service of the aims of relevant international organizations.

As a concrete expression of the determination of my Government to follow the democratic approach, instructions were issued to hold the first elections for the Central Municipal Council in Qatar on 8 March 1999, and citizens eligible to vote were asked to exercise their right. Moreover, the Emir's decision last November establishing a commission to draw up a permanent constitution for the country, which provides for the election of a legislature through direct balloting and represents the belief of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the beloved Emir of the country, in the importance of democracy as a basis for governing and of popular participation in decision-making and in the formulation and sound implementation of State policy.

We should not deny the atrocities and the suspicions of the past. We should seek to prevent the continued violation of basic human rights in the new millennium. We remain convinced that unless progress is made in the realm of economic, social and cultural rights, the world will continue to witness international conflicts leading to migration, displacement and the violation of human rights. On this occasion we must recall the tragedy of the Palestinian people, whose land has been occupied and whose rights have been violated. We call upon the international community to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their national soil.

This fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should prompt further restructuring of United Nations human rights activities and support for the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by ensuring it sufficient financial resources. In this regard, we would like to commend the actions recently taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, and we reaffirm our support for her efforts in this regard.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, who has done his utmost in the service of the international community during this critical phase in the existence of the Organization. I would also like to thank him for attending this commemoration.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Honduras.

Mr. Gutiérrez Navas (Honduras) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I am deeply honoured to address this lofty forum of the international community and to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your eminent guidance of the activities of this session.

We are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international document that expresses the links between individuals and society and upholds the need for an international social order in which the individual's rights and freedoms can and must be fully realized.

Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, we have been struggling to bring about effective and efficient international protection for human rights. Efforts at the regional level in this regard have produced the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and the Inter-American Charter of Social Guarantees, which has a major moral dimension of State commitment. Such efforts have also produced, at the formal legal level, the American Convention on Human Rights of 22 November 1969, which provides guarantees through its international organs, such as the International Law Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the jurisdiction of which my country has accepted unreservedly.

On 24 September 1998, and from this very rostrum, the President of my country, Mr. Carlos Roberto Flores, spoke of Honduras's historical struggle to have a democratic system of Government take root in our soil, to take its place within the international community as a State ruled by law and, in its independent existence as a Republic, to ensure respect for essential human rights and the enjoyment of public freedoms by all our inhabitants. However, many of these efforts were frustrated in some regrettable stages of our past, a past intimately shared with the other States of the Central American region. Fortunately, in recent decades Honduras has maintained and strengthened its democracy and its domestic institutions, despite the upheavals and the deplorable circumstances that prevailed in the Central American region as an involuntary theatre of the cold war, imposed on us from outside, and the attendant, unwelcome armed conflicts.

Because of its geographical situation and by virtue of a strong tradition deeply rooted in the soul of our people, Honduras has for many years been a place of asylum for those who have had to seek abroad the security that at some point they could not find in their countries.

In the last decade, Honduras had to host more than 300,000 refugees. It suffered the grave consequences of instability, insecurity and violence in the region, as a result of which thousands of Honduran citizens emigrated to other countries, particularly to the United States, where, unfortunately, our countrymen have not been treated fairly in that they have not been offered the same opportunities and immigration considerations enjoyed by other Central Americans.

In addition, not long ago, as reported by the international media, all of Honduras was battered by the devastating effects of hurricane Mitch, which destroyed more than 60 per cent of our economic structure, leaving a million people homeless and hungry and depriving more than 6,000 citizens of the dearest human right: the right to life. This is the worst tragedy suffered by my nation in its entire history.

This is an opportune occasion to refer to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as expressed in the Charter, especially the purpose of achieving "international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion". I would also like to quote from the sixteenth preambular paragraph of the Declaration on the Right to Development, adopted by the General Assembly in the annex to resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986:

> "the right to development is an inalienable human right and ... equality of opportunity for development is a prerogative both of nations and of individuals who make up nations".

My country is proud to be an original founding Member of the United Nations, to have incorporated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in our domestic laws and to respect its international commitments in favour of human solidarity, respect for the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, the strengthening of peace and universal democracy.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Sotirov (Bulgaria): Bulgaria has aligned itself with the joint statement made by the Austrian representative on behalf of the European Union.

The tenth of December is a day of celebration, full of events of commemoration and observance here at United Nations Headquarters, as well as around the globe. All of us in the General Assembly Hall heard yesterday one of the greatest voices ever in human history, which is a vivid example of the human race's creativity and uniqueness. And there is no doubt that one of the milestones in the preservation and promotion of this uniqueness and the dignity of the human being is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of a United Nations Declaration that made history. As rightly pointed out by the President of the General Assembly at its third session, back in 1948,

> "It is the first occasion on which the organized community of nations has made a declaration on human rights and fundamental freedoms ... and millions of people, men, women and children all over the world ... will turn for help, guidance and inspiration to this document." (*A/PV.183, p. 166*)

Today we pay tribute to those who, on 10 December 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, prompted by the tragedies and horrors endured during the Second World War, adopted a document that fosters respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and recognizes the importance of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. The rights to life, food, shelter, access to medical care and freedom from torture or arbitrary imprisonment are found there, along with the rights to education, freedom of religious belief, information, expression, association and peaceful assembly, and the right to take part in the cultural life of the community.

The Declaration which contains this broad range of rights became a source of inspiration and the foundation for impressive standard-setting activities within the United Nations. More than 60 United Nations human rights instruments and a large number of regional treaties were inspired by the Declaration. Its principles have been enshrined in and continue to inspire the national legislation and constitutions of many States. References to the Declaration have been made in the charters and resolutions of international organizations, as well as in treaties and resolutions adopted by the United Nations system.

Human Rights Day 1998 is a day on which all of us who enjoy human rights should try to imagine life without them — and how hard we would fight to retain them. It is a day for those who are still denied their human rights to dream again of asserting them, and to know that their dream is our dream — the dream of human rights for all. It is a day for us to recall not only the rights attained over 50 years, but also the rights denied; to pursue the achievement of justice by all and for all; to defend against the abuse of human rights with greater vigilance than ever; and to pursue the violators of human rights with greater persistence than ever.

On this day of celebration, when we recall what has been accomplished, we cannot turn a blind eye to the other side of the coin: there is still a considerable gap between aspirations and achievements, between standards and implementation. We still live in a world where millions are uprooted from their homes and untold numbers arrested arbitrarily or imprisoned without trial. Sadly, it remains a world where torture is practised, where more than a billion people are living in poverty, where children are still exploited, the elderly neglected and women denied their fundamental equal rights. We are still witness to violence and rape, ethnic tensions, discrimination and inequality of economic opportunity, as well as the legacies of abusive regimes. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, put it recently, "the currency of these violations is a sobering reminder that we have no basis for self-satisfaction or complacency."

That is why it is especially rewarding and symbolic for all of us here at the United Nations that two days ago, just in time for the great occasion, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Declaration on human rights defenders.

Today, human rights are present in almost every sphere of the work of the United Nations, from peacekeeping, children's rights and health to the rights of women and indigenous peoples. Bulgaria is actively involved in international cooperation in the human rights field. In the last few years, my country has made considerable steps in making its democratic institutions more effective on the basis of the rule of law. Bulgaria has accepted the highest universal and regional standards and incorporated in its national law the international human rights instruments to which it is a party. The Constitution of 1991 and the following intensive legislation have created a sound basis for democratic rule and for the strengthening of the civil society.

Furthermore, it is now my distinct privilege and honour to announce from this high rostrum that on 10 December, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted an act abolishing the death sentence. The few articles in the penal code that used to provide for capital punishment were replaced by provisions for a maximum sentence of life imprisonment without parole.

In conclusion, I would like to recall an eloquent phrase from the address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the University of Tehran, which marked, exactly one year ago, on 10 December 1997, the beginning of the fiftieth anniversary year:

> "Human rights are the expression of those traditions of tolerance in all religions and cultures that are the basis of peace and progress ... Human rights ... are foreign to no culture and native to all nations ... Tolerance and mercy have always and in all cultures been ideals of Government rule and human behaviour. Today, we call these values human rights." (*SG/SM/6419*)

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): Indonesia is most pleased to join the international community in commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is indeed encouraging that as we prepare to meet the challenges of the venty-first century, we do so on the solid foundation of such instruments of great foresight and idealism.

In the five decades since its adoption, the Declaration has remained the centrepiece of United Nations human rights activities, providing overall guidance for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is the basis for a now vastly enhanced international human rights programme, which has undergone substantial elaboration, not only in the codification of rights and freedoms but also in the development of human rights standards.

I believe it is important to recall on this occasion that much of the strength and relevance of the Declaration derive from the fact that it was carefully crafted through a process of international cooperation in which various points of view and the aspirations of all peoples were heard. Fortunately, the progressive measures and cooperation sought by the Declaration have gained prominence and strength in recent years. Selectivity in human rights should remain a practice of the past and be soundly rejected as we enter a new age.

It is fitting that we celebrate this anniversary during a year in which the United Nations also reviews the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights. For it was at that landmark Conference that the international community reaffirmed its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Declaration, emphasizing its role as the source of inspiration and the basis for United Nations advances in standard-setting. And whereas the Declaration reflects the importance of the health and well-being of the human person and the family, the World Conference stipulated that widespread and extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights. Certainly, we must gain wider respect for the dignity of the human being by lifting mankind out of the poverty in which so many languish. We must provide the means for adequate food, education, health, nutrition and housing that continue to be denied to over a billion people. To that end, advancing the right to development is crucial to the further progress and improvement of the human condition.

For its part, Indonesia has worked vigorously over the past half century to achieve the goals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for even before its adoption in 1948 the essence of its principles was embodied in our national Constitution. A central aspect of our effort has been the alleviation of poverty and the enhancement of the socio-economic environment. Concurrently, in following up and implementing the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, Indonesia has made great strides in many other areas of the human rights spectrum. This year, we have taken significant measures through the adoption of the Indonesian National Plan of Action on Human Rights 1998-2003, which indicates that at least eight international instruments will be considered for ratification over the next five years. Under that plan, Indonesia will enter the next millennium within a culture of human rights.

As we approach the closure of the fifty-third regular session of the General Assembly and celebrate this half century anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us resolve to set political differences aside and work together, as envisaged in the Declaration, in a spirit of cooperation and, through the application of progressive measures, promote and protect universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. There is no better way that we, the inheritors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, can manifest the commitment to human rights which has so often been voiced in this forum, and thereby pass a legacy of genuine accomplishment to succeeding generations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Fiji.

Mr. Rabuka (Fiji): My delegation is most privileged to participate in this auspicious commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, 50 years after the international crusade for human rights was launched, such rights have become entrenched in all aspects of national, regional and international institutions.

As a result of the crusade for international rights, in most countries of the world the suppression of people, dictatorships, autocracy and repressive public administrations have given way to democratic principles, norms and practices. It would be true to say that where the voices of the people were once stifled, they are now speaking out. More and more, the constitutions of nations contain bill-of-rights provisions which set out and guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

Without a doubt, the international community has achieved a great deal in the area of human rights, but as we look at hot spots around the world, the conclusion is obvious that total victory over the abuse and breach of human rights has not been won. As we treasure and pursue the precious gift of human rights, the international community should and must take appropriate and prompt action to address violations of human rights, especially where such violations lead to catastrophic consequences such as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

But while we take steps to buttress respect for and observance of human rights, we must ensure that human rights are not used as a tactic by the more powerful to intervene in the internal affairs of the small, less powerful countries, on the basis of the narrow national interests or considerations of the former.

My delegation also submits that human rights are not totally circumscribed by legal and political rights. My delegation is of the view that economic and social rights must be part and parcel of human rights. Such economic and social rights should and must include the right to life, and life embraces such rights as the right to work, the right to adequate health services and medicinal supplies, the right to adequate housing and the right to the best possible education.

The materialization of these rights will require the full cooperation and collaboration of the international community, especially the developed, industrialized countries, international organizations and international financial institutions in facilitating and promoting the development of developing countries in order that the rights of all peoples in all countries can embrace the rights to employment, adequate health, housing and education and so forth. The right to development should take into account, *inter alia*, social and cultural factors in each country, the level of economic and social development and all other relevant factors. My delegation submits that the realization of the right to development will provide a critical test of the political commitments of Member States in enabling human rights to be enjoyed by people all over the world.

My delegation hopes that the fine and noble sentiments expressed yesterday and today by many delegations will find expression in the annual meetings of the General Assembly, especially in the Main Committees, in particular the Second and Third Committees, and believes that they should permeate the policies of the World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Let us all together pledge to observe and promote human rights in all their aspects, particularly the right to life and the right to development, as we strive to ensure international peace and security the world over.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): The United Republic of Tanzania welcomes the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as both a momentous and reflective occasion.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights continues to stand out as one of the major political statements designed to give effect to the ideals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. While the framers of the Declaration may never have imagined that it would be able to guarantee human rights to all of the world's citizens, it has proved to be a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. It was in the context of these ideals that the constituent parts of the United Republic of Tanzania, the former Tanganyika and Zanzibar, struggled, fought and obtained their independence. Indeed, it is in the pursuit of these ideals that the wars of liberation in southern Africa and elsewhere found justification and international support.

While the successes we can catalogue are both impressive and gratifying, serious shortcomings in the practical implementation of international human rights standards continue to exist. Self-determination and independence did not necessarily result in full respect for the dignity of the citizenry as human beings and as individuals. It is in this regard that we continue to pay homage to the memories of those who lost their lives in the genocides in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and elsewhere. Those atrocities continue to be a grim reminder of the reality that we cannot afford to let down our guard.

As we commemorate this anniversary, it is indeed important that we recommit ourselves to the real meaning of the rights package. Freedom of speech, protection against torture and other civil and political rights are an important component of the package. We have no doubt that this is the truth; but it is not the whole truth. The Universal Declaration established that human rights include the right to social security, the right to a reasonable living standard, the right to food, the right to education, the right to housing, the right to health and the right to work, among others. In other words, it established the right to development. This is the fullness and the essence of human rights.

This fullness, both in our conceptualization and approach to human rights, is important. It is important because it makes social justice a matter of right. Those who belittle or dismiss this concept have, in our opinion, never contended with the extent to which such denial undermines the strengthening of the international human rights regime, which derives its legitimacy and moral authority from the support that all of us must extend.

Perhaps one of the regrettable developments in our efforts to translate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into binding legal instruments was the division of the rights it enunciated into two separate conventions: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That it was not possible to keep them as a package perpetuated the perception that the rights were different in nature: that civil and political rights were primary, while economic and social rights were secondary.

We have never seen it that way, nor are we making that contention. We have seen these rights not as competitive, but mutually supportive. As a result, our Governments now recognize that economic growth and eradication of poverty are indeed encouraged by free discussion and the rule of law. We are also keenly aware that it is far easier to promote civil and political rights in an environment of positive economic development where economic and social rights are protected. We see this approach as constituting the consensus adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights as spelt out in the Vienna Declaration.

The United Republic of Tanzania sees universal human rights as being rooted in many cultures. We therefore believe that we can learn from different cultures in a pluralistic perspective.

In conclusion, what we have achieved as an international community is a milestone. However, we have a long way to go. The challenges before us remain daunting if our people are to realize the full promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary, it is only fitting that we rededicate out commitment to the Declaration and, indeed, to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the representative of Liberia.

Mrs. Gbenyon-Diggs (Liberia): On this auspicious occasion commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to those illustrious visionaries who conceived the idea of universal respect and protection for the inalienable rights of all people, regardless of sex, colour, creed or religion. I feel particularly proud of the role of women in promoting and protecting human rights, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Mary Robinson, champions of increased awareness of human rights issues.

As a result of its moral imperative and the legal and political importance it has attained, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has increasingly become a truly universal document. Indeed, it is a beacon of hope in mankind's struggle for liberty, justice, freedom and human dignity. Liberia, a country born out of a yearning for freedom and independence, knows the virtues of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are proud not only to be one of the original signatories of the United Nations Charter, but also to have been in the vanguard of championing the cause of freedom, self-determination and justice for all.

Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka (Uganda), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The world's greatest achievements are notably recognized on 10 December, when the Nobel Prizes are presented for outstanding accomplishments in world peace, literature and science. It is therefore fitting that in Oslo, Nobel laureates David Trimble and John Hume are being honoured for their contributions to peace-building in Ireland.

There have been enormous gains in transforming the rights of people globally since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50 years ago. However, much remains to be done in States where practical actions are in conflict with the provisions of the Declaration.

In one country after another, the fundamental rights of individuals are being violated in various forms. As the promotion and protection of human rights are central to the wholesome development of the human person, Member States of the United Nations have to adopt practical actions and policies to prevent abuses against their peoples.

We wish to pay deserving tribute to the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which persevered, against all odds, to create the enabling environment that led to the end of the Liberian civil war and the restoration of constitutional democratic rule in which the people of Liberia are assured the enjoyment of their basic human rights. Significantly, ECOWAS bears the distinction of being the first regional organization to collaborate with the United Nations in achieving the peaceful settlement of a conflict.

We are pleased to report that since the end of the civil war in Liberia and the ushering into power of a democratically elected Government, the question of human rights has gained primacy. We have no illusions that democracy inherently protects human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration. Our relatively nascent human rights agenda has made several advances.

In endeavouring to reaffirm Liberia's commitment to human rights, the Government this year constituted, by an act of legislature, an independent Human Rights Commission headed by a former member of the Supreme Court of Liberia. The Commission has the mandate to investigate, document and expose any human rights abuses against persons or groups of persons in order to ensure redress under the rule of law. The Government has also sought, and is receiving, assistance with training in the rule of law, good governance and police sensitivity to human rights concerns.

There is a proliferation of non-governmental human rights bodies in the country which are helping to influence Liberia's policy agenda. The Government welcomes this collaboration and encourages genuine dialogue in this respect. Liberia also has an energetic civil society which has been influential in pressing for greater accountability and transparency in the execution of public policies.

To demonstrate the great importance of the anniversary, the Government of Liberia held a week-long programme — National Human Rights Week — involving a series of activities which commenced on 4 December and ended on 10 December, with a symposium centred around the theme "All Human Rights for All", in close collaboration with civil society, national and international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

Liberia is a party to most human rights instruments. The core treaties that it has not yet ratified or acceded to are now before the Liberian national legislature for action.

As we observe the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to improving the lot of humankind by taking the appropriate actions that will guarantee respect for the rights, dignity and value of others. It is only through positive actions that the generations after us will be assured a peaceful world.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Lesotho.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho): Yesterday was a milestone in human history, representing as it does the celebration, which we continue today, of an event whose meaning for us all is often underrated. To be sure, we all proclaim faith in the magnificence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but if we were to scratch below the surface of those proclamations we might find different understandings of the true essence of the Declaration. The challenge facing humankind in the future, therefore, is to steadfastly work towards a convergence of understandings of the meaning of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties that have emerged from it. We must recognize that human rights exist in truth in their implementation and not in pious declarations. For human rights to be effective, commitment to their observance must be universal. To achieve such a result is the daunting task before us for the next 50 years and beyond. We cannot fully enjoy a human right if not all people understand it the same way and if, consequently, there are varying degrees of commitment to it.

Fifty years ago, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, for many countries under colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean the prospect of the exercise of the right to self-determination seemed so distant. India, the most populous colony, had just gained independence from Britain, while by a perverse coincidence 1948 also marked the birth of apartheid, unarguably the most inhuman system based on theories of racial superiority since the demise of nazism. In those dark days the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a beacon of hope that inspired the resolve of colonial peoples of Africa to battle until self-determination was assured and victory against apartheid achieved. In that battle they were gratified by an outpouring of support from democratic peoples everywhere and by support through the United Nations. It is therefore no accident that today the Governments of Africa are strenuously seeking to consolidate democracy and a culture of the observance of human rights, since it would be ironic if the victims of such egregious human rights violations were themselves guilty of similar conduct.

In Lesotho, for instance, after 23 years of arbitrary rule we are slowly and painfully learning to adjust to the vicissitudes of an imperfect but tried and tested electoral system. The violent reaction of some of our compatriots to the skewed results that are often associated with such a system has left wounds that can only heal when all people of good will determine to resolve differences through dialogue rather than violence. It is heartening to note that, despite the lawlessness that prevailed in the country for weeks, the perpetrators of these acts are being tried in the courts of law and not, as in the past, extrajudicially. The prevailing tolerance has engendered the beginnings of mutual trust, even if this is still fragile, and all political parties have returned to negotiations mediated by our neighbours. The collective will to defend democracy and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms in our region is unwavering.

Even as we celebrate the progress that has been made in the promotion of human rights worldwide, we cannot fail to observe that the road ahead is still very long, steep and slippery. In many countries, including my own, respect for and protection of human rights is a very recent experience which is still fraught with the danger of reversal. But progress there has been. Since 1948 a number of binding commitments have been entered into to strengthen a wide variety of human rights and fundamental freedoms: torture has been outlawed; the acceptance of the right to life is gaining ground; women's right to equality has been reaffirmed time and again even as efforts were made to dilute it by references to equity rather than equality; and most important, the right to development has been recognized.

Lesotho is a party to five of the six major human rights instruments, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Government is in the process of ratifying the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It is also carefully reviewing Lesotho's reservation to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Despite limited resources, it is also revising its strategies for meeting its reporting obligations under the treaties to which it is a party.

Lesotho shares the view that violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are reprehensible. In Rome earlier this year, the international community took a historic step in the name of human rights and the rule of law when it adopted the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Lesotho's active participation in the Rome Conference was guided by our aspiration to bring an end to the global culture of impunity by advancing the cause of international justice. The Court is our proud bequest to future generations, and we pledge our commitment to ensure that the Court is up and running before the end of the century. It is against this backdrop that Lesotho signed the Statute two weeks ago and expects to ratify it soon.

The year 1998 marks not only the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The World Conference on Human Rights recognized the linkages among democracy, peace and development. It also reaffirmed that the right to development was a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights.

As a least developed country, Lesotho attaches the greatest importance to the right to development. We are dismayed, however, that there are still some points of difference between us and some other Member States on the meaning of this right, and we would like to work assiduously towards resolving those differences. Furthermore, we are of the view that official corruption represents one of the most insidious abridgements of the right to development inasmuch as those who benefit from it deny the rest of the populace the resources necessary for their development. A thorough analysis of the right to development is needed before it can be properly understood.

Finally, we also realize the interdependence and mutually reinforcing nature of democracy, development and respect for human rights. We firmly believe that, as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, lack of development should not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of Niger.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I wish to say that my delegation fully associates itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the countries members of the Organization of African Unity.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights unquestionably provides a good opportunity for the General Assembly to assess the international community's implementation of that unprecedented Declaration, and to remove remaining obstacles to the creation of a world culture of human rights. In that connection, we cannot fail to agree that the patient and determined work of the United Nations over half a century to give effect to this moral commitment by the international community has made it possible to make considerable progress in promoting and safeguarding human rights. The promulgation of numerous international legal human rights instruments; notable action taken against racism, racial discrimination, religious intolerance and torture; and support for democratization: these are some of the noteworthy elements of that work.

My delegation takes the excellent opportunity provided by this solemn commemoration to reaffirm the complete faith of the people of Niger in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose essential provisions have, moreover, been integrated into the Constitution that now governs our society.

My delegation wishes also to reaffirm my Government's firm commitment to respect and ensure respect for the rights and freedoms that our Constitution guarantees to every citizen. Indeed, as His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Maïnassara Baré, President of the Republic of Niger, said when he addressed the General Assembly on 23 September, respect for these rights and freedoms "is a precondition for the progress of human society" (*A/53/PV.12, p. 9*).

The grave violations of human rights that continue to be perpetrated in our world — which are due primarily to the absence of the rule of law, bloody conflicts and confrontations and persistent situations of widespread poverty — have also led my delegation to agree that much yet remains to be done in order to build a world where the dignity and value of the individual human being are respected by all. The genocide and war crimes recently committed in the Balkan region and in the Great Lakes region clearly confirm this harsh reality.

It is therefore up to the international community to remain mobilized to ensure respect for political, economic, social, civil and cultural rights everywhere, including the right to development, as set out by Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Moreover, given the resurgence of genocide and other crimes against humanity, we must also establish appropriate jurisdictions in order better to punish the perpetrators of those crimes.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the establishment of the International Tribunals dealing with genocide and war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as the recent establishment of the International Criminal Court, whose Statute the Niger has already signed. We therefore keenly hope that the establishment of such international mechanisms will contribute to preventing once and for all the perpetration of all acts that are abhorrent to the human conscience.

My delegation remains convinced that through further vigorous initiatives we will be able to pass on to future generations a world of peace, liberty and justice stamped with the triumph of human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Dominican Republic.

Ms. Aguiar (Dominican Republic) (*interpretation from Spanish*): With my first words I wish to express the admiration and respect with which my country, the Dominican Republic, associates itself with the observance of this important commemoration.

It was at our ancient university, the oldest in the New World, where the first humanists in the Americas were trained, beginning with the first Rector of the University of Caracas, established in 1725, and the first Rector of the University of Havana, founded in 1728, and going as far back as the founders of the spiritual conquest of the Americas — the sons of Bishop Ramírez de Fuenleal and Alejandro Geraldini, who set up the first American college to promote the humanistic tradition. We in the Dominican Republic can also be proud that our country served as one of the early settings for the very idea of the United Nations, as it was in Old Santo Domingo that the transcendent dilemma of the freedom of the human being was first discussed — a major triumph and political fact of singular significance of the first 20 centuries of the Christian era. The protagonist of that feat was a humble monk and the author of *The Advent Sermon*, Fray Antón de Montesino, a herald of the doctrine that was to serve as a basis for the right of every man — including the aboriginal American, who at the time was still at the margins of civilization — to enjoy the prerogatives that from that time forward were considered to be superior to any reason of State. With these historic contributions and with our participation from the early days of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Dominican Republic has always defended the important principles universally enshrined as inherent rights of humanity.

In the context of an innovative policy in this field, our participation in the 1948 session was marked by the efforts of Ambassador Minerva Benardino, who recently passed away, for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to recognize explicitly the equality of men and women under the law.

We can state with satisfaction on this occasion that the subject of protecting human rights is becoming increasingly relevant on the global agenda. We see that a growing number of countries are ready to harmonize their domestic systems with international standards, which in practice implies the building of a common edifice of shared values with regard to human dignity.

The Dominican Republic has kept all its appointments with history to bring about progress in the field of human rights — at San Francisco in 1945, at Paris in 1948 and at Rome in 1998, where we left a symbol of our attachment to the principles of justice, freedom and liberty in a historic preamble. However, as many of the previous speakers have reaffirmed, human rights are a living, dynamic and evolving issue. We believe in the principles reaffirmed at the Vienna World Conference that human rights are indivisible and interdependent. We believe that the right to development represents the fusion of all the human rights applicable to individuals and peoples and grounded in the testament of those Dominican friars of the sixteenth century, who, on the island of Hispaniola, called on the representatives of the established order to turn their eyes to the general human condition of the oppressed American native as proof of the need to respect human life and treat human beings with dignity.

Today, as yesterday, the Dominican Republic expresses its hope that this legacy will never be betrayed.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Guatemala could not fail to attend this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because first, respect for human rights is a matter of universal concern and it is therefore imperative for every country to strive to ensure their observance. Secondly, respect for human rights is one of the cornerstones of our own recent efforts to establish a democratic society and to consolidate peace in Guatemala. A long road has been travelled towards the fulfilment of the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since the United Nations Commission on Human Rights began, in 1979, to examine the situation of human rights in Guatemala, concluding its consideration of the subject in April of this year. Thirdly, human rights is a matter that links Guatemala intimately to the United Nations. The conclusion in 1994 of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala between the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca not only reaffirmed the country's attachment to the principles and norms designed to ensure and protect the full observance of human rights, it also established a verification mechanism under the United Nations itself.

In addition to recognizing its intrinsic worth, if we are to fully appreciate the Declaration whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating, we should recall that the Declaration constitutes the first enunciation at the global level of the basic principles of human rights. Furthermore, the Declaration is the foundation of the wide-ranging and ever-more effective system of human rights declarations and treaties that have been adopted at both the global and regional levels. Those texts have not only created a large body of rules, but have also established a multitude of jurisdictional and monitoring organs. Furthermore, I do not believe that the operational activities undertaken by the United Nations to promote respect for human rights would be what they are today if this impressive system stemming from the Declaration had not come into being.

I should like to revert to a topic I touched on earlier: the verification of human rights in Guatemala. Following the first and successful instance of its use in the sister Republic of El Salvador, that modality has been, and continues to be, applied for the same purpose. It involves a United Nations mission charged with verifying, *in situ* and with the consent of the Government subject to verification, compliance with an agreement on human rights. In the cases of both El Salvador and Guatemala, the agreement is part of a series of commitments — also subject to verification — that have been entered into in order to put an end to a conflict. This unprecedented and original method of safeguarding peace has been invaluable to our countries.

For all these reasons, it is with the greatest enthusiasm and solemnity that we associate ourselves with the commemoration of the Declaration's fiftieth anniversary. It is our fervent hope that by the dawn of the next millennium, impunity, violence and the absence of the rule of law will have become things of the past.

(spoke in English)

I should like to use my last 30 seconds to suggest that it would be very nice if the Secretariat could prepare, as an additional homage to the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, a document containing all 126 five-minute statements made during this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.

United Nations A/53/PV.90

General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

Official Records

90th plenary meeting
Friday, 11 December 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti . . . . (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 46 *(continued)*

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Draft decision (A/53/L.71)

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Italy.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Italy fully endorses the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, which gave a thorough outline of the Union's policies, philosophy and actions in this crucial area. I wish merely to add some complementary remarks on two human rights areas to which Italy feels especially committed.

Italy is proud to have done its part to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by hosting in Rome the diplomatic conference to establish an international criminal court. We Italians thought that the best way to honour the Declaration was to help the United Nations achieve a goal it had pursued for more than fifty years: the creation of a permanent judicial body to prosecute and punish the most serious crimes of international concern, wherever and by whomever committed. As everyone knows, the conference was a success, and the International Criminal Court is now a reality. Rome, with its millennial legal tradition, provided the ideal setting for this milestone toward defeating the culture of impunity for the most heinous violations of human rights and human dignity. Borders must no longer exist for such crimes.

While the text of the Statute of the International Criminal Court reflects compromise solutions on a number of crucial aspects, the Court is still a strong, effective and independent institution, capable of responding to the demand for justice in today's international society.

What is now essential is to make the new tribunal start its work as soon as possible. We trust that the Preparatory Commission will promptly elaborate the instruments needed for the Statute. More importantly, the signatures and ratifications of the Statute must lead to its entry into force in the year 2000. We warmly congratulate all those States who have already signed the Statute. By the end of this month, 73 nations will have signed it, and we urge all others to do likewise.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, has recently reminded the world that

> "millions of victims of human rights violations are children, who, as the most vulnerable part of society, are victims of abandonment, abuses,

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

> violence, poverty, lack of education, hunger, wars and economic and sexual exploitation".

One of the many disturbing findings in the recent report on the state of the world's children is that 130 million children in developing countries have no access to any form of education.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration recognizes that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Children, first and foremost, need and deserve protection, a principle solemnly reaffirmed and integrated by the United Nations through a series of landmark achievements: the foundation of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1946, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959, the International Covenants on Human Rights of 1966, the International Year of the Child, 1979, and finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of 1989.

This last Convention, which was signed by 193 countries and ratified by 191 of them (six more than the United Nations general membership) has become the most universal legal instrument ever agreed upon by the international community. Furthermore, the relentless work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which meets for a total of three months a year in Geneva to monitor implementation by States parties to the Convention, bears testimony to the ongoing commitment of the international community to the rights of children.

On the solemn occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Italy reaffirms its belief that children are and must remain the priority of our priorities. This conviction stems not solely from humanitarian concerns, but also from the fact that children represent the future of humanity. If we wish to meet and overcome the challenges and uncertainties of the future, then today's children — all of them — must be granted the right to become healthy, educated, mature adults.

From this podium, Italy once again pledges its special commitment to international cooperation in support of child policies, especially in developing countries. We pledge to identify and prioritize, in collaboration with recipient countries, programmes for the care and rehabilitation of children who have been exploited economically or sexually, persecuted, used as soldiers, maimed by mines or left homeless or destitute, who, in short, are the first victims of poverty. To remedy these situations, my Government stands ready to increase its efforts, energies and tangible assistance projects that privilege children and their rights.

I wish to close by taking this opportunity to warmly thank the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for last night's unique celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. The Declaration testifies to the supreme value we all place in the human spirit, and since music is one of the highest expressions of the human spirit, no more fitting tribute to this achievement could have been made than the clarion voice of Luciano Pavarotti and the swinging sounds of Wynton Marsalis.

The Acting President: I call now on the representative of Jamaica.

Ms. Durrant (Jamaica): My delegation associates itself fully with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana on behalf of the Caribbean Community. I make the following statement on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica.

On 10 December 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the international community adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a set of commonly accepted standards based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The international community thus gave recognition to the principle that respect for the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all members of the human family constituted the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Today, some 50 years since this historic event, the Declaration remains a powerful document which continues to influence national legislation and the constitutions of many States. Its emphasis on the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights and fundamental freedoms has inspired numerous human rights instruments, which together constitute an international standard by which the promotion and protection of human rights are measured.

Jamaica joins the international community in underscoring the significance of this fiftieth anniversary and welcomes this year's theme, "All Human Rights for All", which calls for a holistic approach to the issue of human rights and recognizes that the effective promotion of peace and security, economic prosperity and social equity are interdependent and inextricably linked.

Jamaica takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to playing its part in promoting and protecting the individual and collective rights of all, particularly the most vulnerable among us. We are cognizant of the fact that respect for human rights is central to the work of the United Nations — from peacekeeping, children's rights, health, education, social development and protection of the environment to the eradication of poverty. This has motivated our adherence to several human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Further, we have made it our constitutional duty and moral and political obligation to promote respect for human rights. This duty implies a commitment to accountability, transparency and integrity as the basic principles upon which good governance must rest.

It must be acknowledged, however, that while the State bears primary responsibility for ensuring human rights and for creating the necessary environment conducive thereto, people, whether individually or collectively organized in groups, must also take responsibility for the realization and effective promotion and protection of human rights and for building the social harmony and order in which these rights can best be advanced. A social partnership of Government, civil society and private interests in which each person is respectful of the rights of the other and of his or her responsibility to the community, is the best guarantee for the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of each citizen. This is the basis of the Caribbean Charter of Civil Society, to which Jamaica fully subscribes.

Over the last fifty years much has been achieved, but much more remains to be done. Apartheid has been eradicated in South Africa, colonialism has been largely dismantled and the cold war ended, but there still exists widespread discrimination on the basis of race, gender and religious belief. Around the world there is continuing civil strife based on religious intolerance and ethnic hatred. Millions of people are still denied food, shelter and access to medical care and education, and many continue to live in extreme poverty.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Jamaica recommits its best efforts towards building on the achievements of these last 50 years and towards better preparing itself for meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. We shall continue our determined action to promote a national and global order based on justice and equity in which all human rights are preserved, promoted and protected in the true spirit of the Universal Declaration.

The President took the Chair.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives): The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is truly a momentous occasion which calls for both celebration and reflection.

It is a time for celebration because of the enormous contribution the Declaration has made to the cause of promoting human rights the world over. It has produced positive results, advancing human values and giving a fuller meaning to the lives of peoples everywhere. It has spawned and inspired over 60 human rights instruments, many of which enjoy the force of international law.

Yet, we must pause for reflection. Fifty years down the track, formidable challenges persist to inhibit the universal realization of the vision enunciated in the Declaration. Half a century later, there are many tottering on the edge of fear and suffering that the framers of the Declaration wished to banish. Time and again over the past five decades, we have seen a most disturbing trend of relapse to the most heinous crimes against humanity that so galvanized States into action in the aftermath of the Second World War. Today, we must seriously reflect upon ways to prevent such occurrences ever again.

We must also ponder strategies to make the full achievement of the goals of the Declaration truly universal and real. This requires that we recognize the links between peace, democracy and development. None of these could be ignored in our attempts to promote human dignity, alleviate suffering and safeguard the sanctity of the person.

The lot of the poor may make less sensational headlines, but their plight deserves our serious attention if we wish to promote human rights. It has been estimated that more people died of hunger in the first two years of the last decade than were killed as a result of the

First and Second World Wars. During the same period, hunger caused as many deaths every two days as were caused by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The numbers have only increased in the 1990s. It is therefore obvious that the goals of the Declaration cannot be realized without addressing the silent crises of underdevelopment, poverty, population pressures and the degradation of the environment, which impose untold suffering and misery on millions. Therefore, as we step into the next century and the third millennium, we must redouble our efforts to achieve the noble ideals of the Declaration and ensure that human dignity is not the preserve of only the affluent.

We should recognize not only that fundamental human rights are universal in nature but that they must be considered in the context of the dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical backgrounds.

Let me conclude by assuring the Assembly that the Maldives will continue to lend its full support to the efforts and endeavours of this Organization to promote human rights. My country has made sustained progress in the protection and promotion of human rights through peace, democracy and development. We behold the future with optimism and hope, confident of continued happiness. We look forward to continued progress.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): First of all, allow me to congratulate all of us on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The significance of this historic Declaration is clear to all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose provisions are reflected in the constitutions of many States, is the basis for the protection and observance of the basic rights and freedoms of all people in the world. Each individual is entitled to enjoy all basic human rights and to the full protection of those rights, including the right to life, liberty, security of person, citizenship and freedom of movement, ownership of property and the presumption of innocence. Over the past 50 years much has been done in the world to implement the provisions of this Declaration. Regrettably, on this ceremonial day we must acknowledge that human rights continue to be violated in some parts of the world. We call on the international community to unite its efforts to combat such grave human rights violations as genocide, racism and xenophobia.

Since the first days of the restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has experienced the tragedy of serious human rights violations. As a result of continuing aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan, 20 per cent of the territory of our country is currently occupied. The policy of ethnic cleansing, conducted by Armenia in the occupied territories, has brought about the forcible displacement of 1 million people, who have made temporary homes in other towns and villages of Azerbaijan. Clearly, the rights of those people, including such a basic right as the right to live in their own land, have been gravely violated.

Despite all the difficulties that my country has faced since the restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has been consistently building a democratic society. Earlier this year a State commission for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created by decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Recently, the State department for the censorship of the communications media was done away with by presidential decree. One of the great achievements of the democratization of society was the abolition of the death penalty in January of this year. The President introduced another humanitarian act in May: a decree on amnesty for prisoners. In accordance with this decree, thousands of convicted persons were amnestied. In order to strengthen the legal human rights instruments, in February the President introduced an act on measures to ensure the freedoms and rights of citizens.

A research institute on human rights has recently been set up. The institute is devoted to finding ways to create mechanisms for the comprehensive protection of human rights and basic freedoms. On 4 December 1998, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Heydar Aliyev, addressing the meeting of the State commission on the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mentioned the positive development of the growing cooperation between Government structures and non-governmental organizations in the field of the protection of human rights. He expressed the opinion that notwithstanding some success in the area of observance and protection of human rights, much more had to be done in order to achieve better results. That is the common goal of our Government structures and of every individual.

The achievement by the Republic of Azerbaijan of the status of special guest in the Council of Europe is an important contribution to the development of democratic reforms. It provides an opportunity for us to become deeply integrated into European legal structures and to receive expert assistance for the success of reforms in Azerbaijan.

The Government of Azerbaijan continues to provide all the conditions necessary for the protection of human rights. In addition to the new Constitution, by which the basic rights and freedoms of citizens are ensured, legislation has been adopted on political parties and public organizations, on the communications media, on freedom of religion and on alternative military service. Many of the bills that have been passed in Azerbaijan, including those relating to presidential elections and the Central Electoral Committee, have been endorsed by legal experts from international organizations. In recent years, the Parliament of Azerbaijan has enacted legislation that has totally changed the rules and functions of law-enforcement agencies and courts, including those relating to the police, to prosecution, to courts and judges and to the constitutional court. Draft laws on the municipalities and on elections to the municipal bodies are currently under consideration in Parliament.

We realize that the creation of a domestic legal foundation is not sufficient to create a democratic society. Since the first day of its independence, our country has acceded to 109 international legal instruments, covering almost all areas of life. The Government is doing its utmost to implement the provisions of those instruments. More than 30 of them deal with the protection and observance of human rights.

In the past, Azerbaijan has presented to the Secretary-General initial reports on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Preparation of the second periodic reports is currently under way.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize the crucial role played by the United Nations and its agencies in the comprehensive observance of human rights throughout the world. I call on all States to continue their support for the United Nations in order to ensure full protection for and observance of human rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Panama.

Mr. Stagg (Panama) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In their desire to seek justice in the period of great confusion experienced by mankind 50 years ago, persons of goodwill came together, in the midst of inequities of all kinds, with the aim of finding ways to express the aspirations of humankind. The Declaration that emerged from those meetings in 1948, although it is not perfect, includes the legal and moral bases that a new society desired in order to overcome the divisions of the world. The Declaration that dates from that period seeks to define an order for public life, morality and general well-being in an attempt to find the correct interpretation of an enjoyment of the freedoms and rights formulated therein.

At that time, the Commission on Human Rights was established within the Secretariat, and it began the study of various projects on which the Panamanian internationalists Mr. Ricardo Alfaro and Mr. Mario de Diego worked with great perseverance.

For the first time, an organized community of nations achieved a Declaration on fundamental human rights and freedoms in a document that had the support of the millions of people represented in the United Nations, men, women and children from all parts of the planet seeking support and guidance in order to find the best possible solutions to humankind's problems.

On 4 September 1998, at a meeting of the Rio Group, the Government of the Republic of Panama articulated in the Panama Declaration the common standard that all peoples and nations of the world wish to attain, taking into account the principles of the universality and indivisibility of human rights, democracy and development. On that historic occasion, we expressed the deep concern of our peoples with regard to having a modern and effective judicial order. We spoke out very strongly against racial discrimination and in favour of fair conditions of migration, which is an entitlement of all human beings regardless of origin.

Panama has always been ready to ensure the exercise of fundamental human rights in order to prevent cruel, inhumane or degrading punishment or treatment from being meted out in any part of the world.

In modernizing our economy we have frequently experienced the traumas often entailed by structural reforms, which are necessary even though they may be painful. But, fortunately, with a minimum of suffering we have managed to move forward with progressive Governments such as the present one.

Our country has always supported appropriate protection for the most vulnerable groups of society, particularly ethnic minorities, women and children. Our citizens are aware that education and the eradication of poverty are the best way to promote human rights.

We wish to place on record our tribute to the great efforts made in the last four years by the First Lady of Panama with a view to fulfilling all the provisions relating to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to the good treatment of children.

On 26 January 1990, Panama signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ratified it on 5 October 1990. The Convention entered into force on 11 January 1991. We are very proud to say that we have always promoted the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who have been the victims of all kinds of conflicts, abuse, abandonment, exploitation and torture in order to provide them with a climate in which they can enjoy better health, self-respect and a childhood in dignity.

As a priority, the Republic of Panama has become a party to the various conventions and protocols that provide for basic measures to combat international terrorism. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is one of the oldest treaties for the protection of human rights; it was adopted on 9 December 1948, a day earlier than the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Regrettably, today there are still Governments in the world that have been unable to suppress this deplorable manifestation of hatred and have persisted in using the power of their armies as an instrument of diplomacy.

This year's adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome is a significant step forward towards punishing genocide.

We are particularly gratified to note the beneficial participation of the United Nations Development Programme in promoting greater respect for the human rights of our people.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): Following one of the darkest pages in the history of humankind, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

This was not just an act of faith expressing the protestations of the human conscience at the horrors of the Second World War; it was also, above all, a founding act. By proclaiming basic universal and indivisible human rights for the individual, the Declaration achieved an ideal for all of humankind by offering both a basis and a framework for all further progress in this field.

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of this historic document. This is an opportunity for us not only to go back to our sources but also to consider the message of the Declaration, which, it should be recalled, has lost neither its strength nor its currency.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, considerable efforts to build and codify rights for the individual have been carried out. The international community has adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as Conventions on the elimination of discrimination against women, on racial discrimination and against torture.

To ensure the reality of these rights, especially at the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights was adopted. Similarly, at the domestic level, the promotion and protection of human rights is a major requirement for the third Malian Republic. I would like in this regard to mention the institutionalization, since 1994, of our democratic appeals system, which enables individuals, political parties and civil society to appeal directly and publicly, on 10 December every year, to the Government regarding respect for human rights in Mali.

In the same spirit, we have institutionalized a children's parliament, which is a forum for the children of Mali to express themselves freely to help public authorities implement a national plan of action for the survival, development and protection of the child.

At a time of globalization and of growing influence by economic actors, we must struggle for human rights especially in the area of inequality and exclusion. Democracy and economic development are mutually reinforcing and together foster a climate propitious for the establishment of a State based on the rule of law, in which both tension and poverty are reduced.

Convinced of these facts, Mali is committed to promoting the right to development, which is the preeminent right of solidarity. This new human right, based on the idea of interdependence, means that all human beings and all peoples have a right to development: to prosperity, which in turn will prevent hunger, disease and illiteracy. It also means greater justice in international economic relations.

As we follow up the outcome of the 1993 Vienna Conference, we must together consider new threats to human rights: such problems as the deterioration of the environment, artificial procreation and information technologies, which can call into question the right to life, the integrity of the individual or freedom of expression.

At the same time, how can we fail to welcome the adoption, in this fiftieth-anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the Statute of the International Criminal Court? My country, Mali, has already signed the Statute and will do its utmost for the speedy establishment of the Court, which is an essential instrument for the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I reaffirm Mali's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, *inter alia* through its unqualified support for the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on this item.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to consult the Assembly with a view to proceeding immediately to consider the draft decision contained in document A/53/L.71. In this connection, since that document was circulated only a short while ago, it would be necessary to waive the relevant provision of rule 78 of the rules of procedure, which reads as follows:

> "As a general rule, no proposal shall be discussed or put to the vote at any meeting of the General Assembly unless copies of it have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the meeting".

Bearing in mind the content of the draft decision, by which the Assembly would simply decide to include in the agenda of its fifty-eighth session an item entitled "Fifty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", may I take it that the Assembly agrees to that proposal?

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We shall now proceed to consider draft decision A/53/L.71. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call now on the representative of Eritrea.

Mr. Seyoum (Eritrea): As we commemorate the fiftieth year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is much for all of us to reflect upon in our common conception of what constitutes universally applicable human rights and our practice in their implementation. I believe that we all maintain, or at least declare we maintain, that the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are lofty ideals that should guide the conduct of all Governments, institutions and individuals in their handling of every person and every social group. Much has also been done in articulating and expanding the interpretation of the rights set out in those articles since they were proclaimed 50 years ago.

On this, there is hardly any controversy. If differences exist, it is in minor areas where differences in cultural heritage and other specific local conditions are at times invoked by some as excuses for limiting the scope of the application of some of the articles of the Declaration. Socio-economic development, widening global interaction, the rise in the general level of education and the resulting higher level of consciousness will, I believe, of necessity bridge the already narrow gap that exists among these interpretations. The Government of the State of Eritrea reaffirms that the Declaration is truly universal and that the notion of human rights ingrained in its principles can easily be traced through the linguistic, cultural and traditional structures of all societies.

The widest gap exists between what is embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the practice of human rights. The worldwide campaign for respect for human rights has commendably been increasing, and this effort has definitely raised awareness, hope and the will to struggle in the powerless of the world. The human rights records of most Governments and the responses of others to those records, however, still fall far short of what needs to be done to ensure a humane existence for peoples throughout the world. For many Governments, human rights is often raised as a mere slogan, or is used as a political instrument to be applied against enemies, glossed over with friends and neglected where direct national interests warrant it.

Given such a reality, the United Nations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, becomes a crucial instrument for collective action in raising the voice of the voiceless and defending the rights of the defenceless, who are still the victims of horrendous crimes. For exerting tireless efforts to ensure that the United Nations meets this challenge, the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, must be commended.

It goes without saying, of course, that the United Nations is the sum of its sovereign Member States, and the hands of its officials and institutions will remain weak or even tied unless the will to cooperate with their efforts is there from each and every nation. This cooperation, we must dare to admit, has not been there to the degree required, especially from those that have the capacity to provide it. But although unanimity may not be there, bold concerted efforts must be made by those committed to uphold and ensure the universal application of human rights. Such efforts, which represent the aspirations of the powerless billions in the world, can empower them and all those in and outside the United Nations who are engaged in defending human rights throughout the world to prevail against those that abuse them with impunity.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would like to state here that my country's constitution upholds human rights and that my Government spares no effort to ensure that human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are respected within Eritrea's borders. Our record proves this fact even during the most trying of times — in times of war and conflict.

It is deplorable to witness, however, that certain Governments openly and flagrantly abuse human rights in the most heinous ways and that such crimes are allowed to continue without the appropriate response from the international community. I refer here, as a case in point, to the continuing deportation, detention, expropriation and inhumane treatment of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin by the Ethiopian Government, which have led not only to the suffering of tens of thousands but also to the deaths of many. To date, the number of those unjustly deported and arbitrarily detained has reached more than 40,000, and as I speak now to the Assembly, the witch-hunt and rounding up of those still remaining in the country is continuing.

Ethiopia's crimes against these innocent Eritrean civilians have been verified by numerous independent observers and condemned by some. Yet, the regime continues those crimes with impunity because there has not been appropriate international reaction against it. Unless action is taken where human rights crimes are perpetrated, the gap between our declared ideals and our actions will continue to widen, thus nullifying the meaning of the very ideals we purport to uphold.

Irrespective of this disappointment, my country pledges never to be deterred from doing its utmost to ensure that its actions conform to its beliefs and to continue to join those who are committed to working for a just world where human rights are universally respected. The United Nations needs to be the primary central forum for the coordination of such a collective effort. It is my sincere hope that our individual and collective actions in the days and years to come will live up to the high ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the expectations of the powerless, who have no other recourse but to put their hope and trust in us to stand for them.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*interpretation from French*): We have come together here today to commemorate solemnly the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted in 1948 by our Assembly, this historic Declaration remains the principal frame of reference for defining the needs of mankind in achieving its full development. It also embodies the hopes and ardent aspirations of the peoples of the world to live in peace, security and dignity and to fully enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Fifty years have elapsed and the world is still far from attaining the ideal that inspired the General

Assembly in 1948. Destitution, disease and hunger continue to haunt us and remain the major impediments to the full enjoyment of human rights. Given such a situation, it is vital for the international community to pool its efforts and undertake more vigorous actions in the search for the common objectives that we have set for ourselves.

The Lao nation is an ancient one, known for its age-old past. Throughout its long history, our heroic country has been the target of various foreign aggressions. Animated by an indomitable spirit of struggle and a determination to overcome, the multi-ethnic Laotian people has risen again and has always resisted the yoke of foreign domination. In declaring the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on 2 December 1975, the whole of the Lao people exercised its fundamental right to self-determination. Since the establishment of the new people's regime, our Government has spared no effort to rebuild its war-ravaged homeland, while at the same time ensuring the security of the State and social and political stability.

In 1991, the first constitution of the Republic to clearly set out the rights and duties of Laotian citizens was enacted. Many other laws in numerous fields were subsequently adopted, attesting to the Government's resolve to gradually convert our country into a State under the rule of law. The people of Laos now live in peace and harmony and are fully dedicated to building the national economy with a view to extricating the country from its current state of underdevelopment by 2020.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is 50 years old today. While significant contributions have been made in the field of human rights, much remains to be done. While reiterating our principled position that human rights should under no circumstances be used as political instruments to interfere in the domestic affairs of others, we believe that it is essential for the international community to cooperate and work together to achieve its goals in this regard. Only cooperation and sincere international dialogue will ensure success in this difficult undertaking of promoting human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Mwamba Kapanga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): One year from the dawning of a new millennium, while the international community celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is hardly any need to recall that my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the subject of an armed aggression that is jeopardizing the basic rights of its citizens and that presents a serious threat to its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Despite that situation, which is a supreme example of the violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by virtue of the excesses committed daily against the populations of occupied provinces by the aggressors, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a peace-loving nation respectful of international conventions, would like to reaffirm its commitment to the principles set forth in the United Nations Charter.

The liberation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 17 May 1997 was intended to put an end to dictatorship and to give the Congolese people back their dignity, which had been so greatly affronted, through the establishment of the rule of law, respecting basic freedoms and human rights. My Government is among those that believes that recognition of the dignity inherent in all members of the human family and of their equal and inalienable rights is the basis for freedom, justice and peace throughout the world.

That is why, immediately following liberation, the Government worked resolutely to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the national territory and to establish human rights programmes. It must be acknowledged that despite all the obstacles encountered, our Government has, even in the difficult context of the current war of aggression, managed to give material expression to the dedication of the Congolese people to a culture of peace and human rights.

Despite the situation on the ground, the Government has adhered to its time-table for the effective democratization of the national political territory. To this end, several phases of the electoral time-table have been completed. The latest was the announcement by the head of State, at the twentieth Summit Conference of the French and African Heads of State, of the lifting at the end of January 1999 of measures suspending activities by political parties.

We would note the creation on 1 June 1998 of a Ministry for human rights whose aim is to promote and protect the rights of the individual in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That Ministry is also endeavouring to promote and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. It is also noteworthy that since 28 September 1998, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been given access by my Government to combatants and other detainees as well as to prisoners of war. The Red Cross has already begun its work by applying the relevant criteria for visits and hearings.

Another of my Government's achievements is the establishment of an interdepartmental commission for humanitarian issues which, in the context of the current aggression, ensures protection for vulnerable individuals and facilitates the departure abroad of those who wish to do so.

With respect to the commemoration of the event that brings us together at this time, I should like to inform the international community that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a State Member of the United Nations, in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has not remained on the sidelines of this event. It is pursuing in this context the implementation of a national plan of action for education in the area of human rights.

Therefore, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Kinshasa, the Ministry for human rights of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has for the past few weeks been sponsoring various types of activities as part of a campaign to heighten awareness of human rights throughout various sectors of Congolese society, especially civil society, universities, the army, the police and the judiciary.

The Ministry for human rights has just announced its determination to enter into partnership with the army and the national police with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights. Furthermore, on Tuesday, 8 December 1998, it began a campaign to disseminate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in all four national languages.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would like to reiterate its request for assistance in reforming its judicial system so as to help sustain its ongoing efforts to better promote and protect human rights throughout our national territory. Such an attitude would be in keeping with the mission of the United Nations, whose primary task is to promote universal adherence to the international instruments and their more strict implementation by States parties.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our Government's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its determination to establish the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, let me state that the Congolese Ministry for human rights, which handles the national coordination of human rights issues, will continue to ensure full respect by all parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for fundamental human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Gabon.

Mr. Essonghe (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation would like at the outset to associate itself with the statement made yesterday evening by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the States members of the Organization of African Unity.

Through its adoption of instruments on the promotion and protection of human rights, the United Nations has set out to respond to the many attacks against and violations of the dignity and integrity of human beings around the world throughout history. At the very beginning of its existence, our Organization embarked on a debate on human rights which culminated, on 10 December 1948, in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today's commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of that Declaration gives us an opportunity to see how far we have come.

Much has already been said about the milestones in the area of fundamental human rights from the Declaration's adoption in 1948 to the present day. The year 1998 has been key in this respect, with, *inter alia*, the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the launching of preparations for the World Conference against racism, racial and ethnic discrimination, xenophobia and other related contemporary forms of intolerance. And let us not forget the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, adopted at the Rome Conference in July by a number of countries, including my own.

However, after 50 years of efforts and progress in promoting and protecting human rights, we must face the fact that worldwide, massive violations of the principles set out in the Declaration continue to take place, even though the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be one of the priority goals of the international community.

In keeping with this philosophy, Gabon consider human rights to be one of the basic foundations of its existence. The establishment of a State based on the rule of law, founded on respect for the law and in particular for human rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was the ongoing concern of our forefathers, who led our country to independence. In our Constitution, therefore, the Gabonese people affirm their resolve to safeguard their independence and national unity as well as their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. That resolve, under the leadership of Mr. El Hadj Omar Bongo, has been reflected at the international level in our accession to the majority of existing human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Also, having chaired the ad hoc working group of the Security Council on the situation of conflicts in Africa, we cannot fail to mention the close link between conflicts and human rights.

As you know, the many conflicts that continue to fester throughout the world, particularly in Africa, have given rise to many flagrant violations of human rights and of humanitarian law committed against civilian populations and refugees. It is for this reason that we call for an end to the flow of weapons to those regions of the world.

The enjoyment of human rights is also a long-term undertaking which must neither neglect nor ignore the economic, social or cultural needs of the individual. For how can we truly speak of human rights when access to foodstuffs and education is not available to the vast majority of the world's people, in particular those of the South.

This issue, as we see it, should be an absolute priority among the tasks still to be done in order to bring ourselves into line with all the noble ideals embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Similarly, the international community must ensure that the new millennium is free from the moral ravages that humankind has experienced, such as slavery, colonialism, apartheid and genocide, just to cite a few examples.

Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) (*interpretation from French*): Today we are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which may be regarded as one of the great achievements of the United Nations. It is an opportunity for us to consider humankind's achievements in terms of securing the dignity of the human individual and to implement the fundamental principles of justice, freedom and peace.

Throughout the last half century, unquestioned progress has been achieved in the area of combating human rights violations, and fundamental achievements have consolidated democracy and expanded the scope of freedom throughout the world. However, these remarkable advances do not mean that humankind's objectives have been achieved, for man is still facing tremendous challenges which impede the implementation of an impressive number of accepted rights.

The proliferation of ethnic conflicts, genocide, the rise of racism and exclusivity, discrimination towards women, the persecution of minorities, imprisonment without due process, terrorism, worsening poverty and the harassment of human rights defenders are there as examples to remind us of this. Furthermore, advances in the area of human rights have essentially related to the civil and political fields, and inadequate attention has been given to economic, social and cultural rights. I hardly need to stress that economic development and social development are a key in economic recovery and in the development of democracy, political stability and human rights.

Morocco, which takes an active part in the building of a fair, just and democratic world order, today reiterates its commitment to the principles that motivated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirms its commitments to the strengthening of the rule of law, the protection of rights and freedoms in accordance with the precepts of Islam and the provisions of the constitution and international conventions ratified by our Kingdom.

In recent years, Morocco has passed through important stages on the path towards promoting and improving the situation in the area of human rights. The situation has undergone remarkable developments as result of the strengthening of the legal, judicial and administrative structures, including the creation of the Ministry of Human Rights and a number of other juridical instruments. Action to promote and protect human rights in Morocco is undertaken by governmental institutions, as well as by a large number of non-governmental organizations representing various political tendencies. The Advisory Council on Human Rights is responsible for ensuring the compatibility of national legislation with the spirit and letter of international instruments to which Morocco subscribes.

Among the actions undertaken in the area of promoting human rights is education on the principles of human rights and international conventions to which Morocco is a party, including training institutes designed to educate citizens as to their responsibilities. Morocco has also ratified most international instruments on human rights, being convinced that the rule of law, the freedom and equality of individuals, the rights of peoples, mutual understanding and cooperation will ultimately prevail.

The resolve of the Moroccan Government to promote human rights has been bolstered by the recent constitution, which stipulates that the Kingdom endorses the principles, rights and obligations stemming from the charters of the international agencies and reaffirms its commitment to human rights as universally recognized.

In April 1998 the Advisory Council on Human Rights held in Marrakesh the first Mediterranean meeting of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, in consultation with the Consultative Commission on Human Rights of France and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean conference held in Barcelona in 1995. This meeting culminated in the adoption of a protocol relating to the creation in Morocco of a training and documentation centre on human rights, a centre whose aim is to help to improve public perception of the universality and indivisibility of human rights with a view to establishing a better understanding of the values of peace, tolerance and dialogue.

Thanks to the resolve of and the guidance from His Majesty the King, the provisions adopted by the Moroccan Government to clear the outstanding files and the projects under way to harmonize laws, to establish education in human rights, to develop a dialogue and partnership with the various movements in society attest to Morocco's political will to establish a society built on solidarity and concertation.

While the phenomenon of globalization and interdependence which have marked the latter part of this century undoubtedly helps to improve and develop the world economy, it necessitates proper adjustments in order to avoid marginalizing countries whose economies are still precarious. It would seem appropriate to establish a democratic and fair dialogue, in which all States concerned can participate in order to realize the right to development, which is the aspiration of all developing countries. There is no question that this objective can be achieved only through strengthened United Nations intervention in the area of international cooperation for development.

Allow me to conclude by congratulating the United Nations for all its tireless efforts in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights, notwithstanding all the challenges of this latter part of the century.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritius.

Mr. Wan Chat Kwong (Mauritius): The signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50 years ago was humanity's response to the darkest impulses of human nature, as revealed by the unspeakable horrors perpetrated during the Second World War. This Declaration was, at the same time, an act of faith that mankind can also be inspired by the most noble sentiments and aspirations.

But simply proclaiming the universal validity of human rights was, alas, by no means adequate to assure their observance and respect everywhere. As recent atrocities committed in parts of Europe, Africa and Asia attest all too well, the lessons of the Second World War do not seem to have been fully learned, and the call of "Never again" not sufficiently echoed.

Human rights will therefore remain the stage for perpetual struggle between the powers of darkness and the forces of enlightenment. That is the message my Prime Minister conveyed in concluding his statement last Tuesday at the unveiling ceremony of a monument dedicated to the Universal Declaration:

> "[The monument] is a permanent reminder to us of the dangers of complacency in the face of bigotry and intolerance and the overriding need for unity in the face of threats to democratic and decent values in public life."

Debates on human rights have all too often been polarized between those, at one end, who are perceived as laying greater stress on civil and political rights and others, at the other, who hold that economic and social rights are pre-eminent. We believe that the opposition between these two sets of rights is only apparent. They are in fact the two sides of the same coin. Any model of society which does not simultaneously embrace and advance both sets of rights will sooner or later hit the limits of its expansion.

My Prime Minister, in addressing this Assembly in the general debate of the current session, announced that Mauritius would soon introduce a bill on the protection of human rights in the National Assembly. This bill was debated in our National Assembly during its current sitting and adopted three days ago on Tuesday.

Under the provisions of this bill, a national human rights commission will be established. This commission will be empowered to investigate any complaint of alleged violation of human rights. It will also be able to look into complaints against members of the police force if, following internal investigation, they are not resolved in a satisfactory manner. The commission will therefore act as a watchdog over possible cover-ups or leniency towards abuse by the police.

In setting up this commission, my Government hopes to reinforce the effective protection of the fundamental rights of its citizens already afforded to them under the Constitution. Current judicial recourse against breaches or alleged violations of human rights can be time-consuming and costly. This new body will enable citizens to seek redress more easily.

Other recent measures taken by my country for the protection of the more vulnerable members of society include the establishment of a Child Development Unit with the task of protecting children from abuse and counselling parents of ill-treated children. Last year, a Domestic Violence Intervention Unit was set up to provide psychological counselling and assistance to victims in court.

The theme for this fiftieth anniversary is "All human rights for all". Through the choice of this theme, all Member States of this Organization are being challenged to place human rights at the centre of their policies. Mauritius pledges its full cooperation towards the attainment of this objective.

Next January, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) will hold its first ministerial conference on human rights in Africa. At the invitation of the OAU, Mauritius has agreed to host this timely event.

Mrs. Ahmed (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a very important historical document that has always enjoyed the respect of all countries of the world because it deepens and perpetuates the highest values of our human heritage. The Declaration makes frequent reference to the importance of human rights throughout history. Moreover, all heavenly religions urge respect for human beings and their rights and dignity.

In this context, national efforts for the promotion of human rights are exerted. That is why the Sudanese Constitution and relevant legislations, provide for respect of all the human rights of every citizen, without discrimination. My country participates with the international community in celebrating this occasion and reaffirms its commitment to all international human rights covenants. In so doing, my country is acting consistent with its cultural heritage and the tolerant values by which it is guided. It derives these from Islam, which 1,400 years ago established an integrated system for the protection of civil and political rights and consolidated the principle of honouring and preserving the freedom of peoples. Islam also addresses all human beings without discrimination. In the Holy Koran, God says:

> "We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation." (*The Holy Koran, XVII:70*)

As we observe this important occasion, it would seem appropriate that we recall the need for tolerance and objectivity in addressing questions of human rights and that we steer away from politicization, selectivity and double standards, in order to attain the noble objectives for which the relevant legislation was enacted. In this context we should take into consideration the social, cultural, ideological and religious particularities of every society. Thus, we should focus on the right to development as an integral part of human rights, especially in the developing countries, where poverty and the lack of basic services hinder the enjoyment of human rights.

This historic occasion coincides with the passage of 50 years since the beginning of the fraternal Palestinian people's crisis. The international community should continue to support the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their own State on their national territory.

We wish once again to welcome this special occasion and the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, in supporting and promoting respect for human rights at all levels. Let us all pray for a world in which the values of liberty, equality and justice may prevail, without discrimination as to religion, gender or language.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Ethiopia.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia): Fifty years ago, on 10 December 1948, this Assembly took a historic step by adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by proclaiming it as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations in the promotion and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The manifold forms of misery which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sought to eradicate 50 years ago remain prevalent throughout the world. Over 1 billion people today still live in absolute poverty, deprived of their daily basic needs. This situation makes it necessary for concrete steps to be taken to ensure the universal enjoyment and realization of all human rights, in particular the right of all to development.

As a founding Member of the United Nations that had the privilege of participating in the formulation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and based on its own recent experience, Ethiopia fully recognizes the significance and historic importance of this document. In this respect, I wish to point out that, in today's Ethiopia, the promotion and respect of human rights have become the foundation upon which the political and democratic transformation, as well as the economic development of the country, firmly rest. To this end, following the collapse of the military regime in 1991, the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were incorporated into the transitional Charter of Ethiopia, thereby becoming part of the law of the country, and subsequently reaffirmed in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, while incorporating the basic principles and ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also stipulates that all human rights provisions of the Constitution shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments accepted by Ethiopia. At present, Ethiopia is a party to all major international human rights instruments. Furthermore, additional practical measures, ranging from the general review of the legal system to the establishment of a national human rights commission and an ombudsman office, have been undertaken in order to strengthen the promotion of basic human rights and freedom in Ethiopia.

It is indeed quite unfortunate and sad to note that the Government of Eritrea has once again demonstrated its utter contempt for the international community by taking advantage of this august occasion and having the audacity to make the usual litany of false accusations of human rights violations against Ethiopia. It is therefore with great reluctance that my delegation would like to set the record straight, although such irrelevant rhetoric ought not have the dignity of attention.

The facts are very clear. The Eritrean regime committed an act of aggression against Ethiopia, a gross violation of human rights in itself, on 12 May 1998. During this wanton action, Eritrean forces deliberately chose to attack civilian targets, such as schools and health centres, killing scores of innocent people, including children and women. In addition, more than 30,000 Ethiopians were brutally expelled from Eritrea after their properties were confiscated and subjected to the worst forms of abuse. The Government of Eritrea attempted to create havoc inside Ethiopia by organizing some of its citizens in the country into clandestine terrorist groups, prompting the Government to take some precautionary measures in order to safeguard the national security of the country and its citizens.

The irresponsible action of the Eritrean Government is clearly attested to by its rather negative response to the various peace proposals of friendly countries and its defiance of the Organization of African Unity and Security Council resolutions to reverse its act of aggression.

Therefore, although it has not been our intention to raise this issue here, I would like to inform the Assembly that the accusations made by the Eritrean representative are no more than a continuation of prevarication and diversionary tactics by the Eritrean Government, in order to present itself to the international community as a victim, while the facts on the ground are quite the reverse.

In conclusion, while reaffirming Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to the full realization of the principles and ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, my delegation would also like to underscore the importance of international cooperation and support of efforts aimed at promotion of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Swaziland.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland is pleased to join previous speakers who have spoken on this agenda item and supports the resolution on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As we all recall, since its establishment the United Nations has been determined to help realize in all countries fundamental human rights and ensure the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal enjoyment of rights of men and women. It has done this through its determination to maintain international peace and security, thus enhancing international law, the promotion of social progress and better living standards.

Whilst much has been achieved in the promotion and maintenance of human rights and fundamental freedoms since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the world community is still faced with a multitude of challenges today as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

It is worth noting that progress in this area has been stifled in the developing nations of the world, particularly in Africa, by historical political considerations. There is need for genuine collaboration in recovering from the effects of the colonial and cold-war eras. Furthermore, the problem of poverty prevalent in all countries of the world is far more acute in Africa. Unfortunately, poverty can only provoke violent reactions. It is a fact that economic frustrations have led to crises most often leading to armed conflict. The eradication of poverty should remain central to our endeavours to address the prevention of causes of conflict. It is extremely disturbing, though, that the efforts by the United Nations and the international community to eradicate poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and malnutrition have not been met with strong political will to mobilize and use the much-needed resources, which would only ensure that the rights of the voiceless are attained.

We believe that national effort must be supported in a spirit of true partnership. Cooperation at the international level is important in ensuring the promotion of all human rights, bearing in mind that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The Kingdom of Swaziland would like to emphasize that partnership in this regard should be aimed at ensuring universal respect for the full enjoyment by all people of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, including the right to self-determination.

May I sound a word of caution that selectivity and conditionalities only result in negativity. Political rights must be considered on a level equal to the right to development. After all, the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development over ten years ago was a very important development which marked a turning point in the efforts of the United Nations in resolving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian nature and in enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for every human person and for all peoples in all countries of the world, particularly in developing countries. Furthermore, we believe that recognition, promotion and realization of the right to development is a major step forward towards the achievement of that goal in improving a comprehensive and integrated approach to human rights.

The adoption of the Rome Statute, creating the International Criminal Court in July 1998, could not have come at a more opportune time. This century has seen the worst violence in the history of mankind. In the past 50 years, millions of people have been stripped of their basic human rights, their property and their dignity in conflicts all over the world. Most of these victims have been simply forgotten and few perpetrators have been brought to justice. With the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the growing global culture of impunity will come to an end and the concerns of the victims of those offences covered by the Statute will be addressed accordingly.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is fully committed and desires to promote and protect the full enjoyment of human rights by all Swazis. Continuous efforts are being undertaken to eradicate poverty, improve health conditions, substantially reduce unemployment, ensure the implementation of education regarding all policies, including the policy of equality between women and men, as well as other social and economic policies aimed at improving the living conditions of all citizens. Furthermore, the political rights of the Swazi citizens are promoted and protected and programmes aimed at ensuring them are in place. This includes the Constitutional Review Commission, which has achieved substantial progress in its work.

Another very important achievement in the past year has been the completion of the National Development

Strategy, which provides the framework for the nation's development priorities over the next 25 years, including the question of human rights in all its forms. This includes the Economic and Social Reform Agenda, which is intended to boost the economic efforts of the Kingdom of Swaziland. It is aimed at affording people at all levels, including the grass-roots level, economic empowerment. The Investment Promotion Authority is yet another initiative, and it acts as the Kingdom's contact point with the global business community in attracting investment on a large scale. It thus serves to accelerate the tempo of the economic empowerment of the people at the grass-roots level.

The Swazi nation is involved in all these vitally important exercises. In fact, it is a Swazi way of life to debate issues and consult in open forums, thus giving all people the opportunity to express their views and have them considered.

May I conclude by urging the international community that, as we enter the new millennium, the nations of the world must recommit themselves to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In doing so we would be living up to the standards and expectations of our peoples, who look up to this Organization as a provider of international peace and security, stability, sustainable development and hope for the future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today's observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlights the importance accorded by the United Nations and the entire international community to the issue of human rights and the search for a world in which humankind can enjoy freedom, justice and equality, a world that is secure and prosperous for the present generation and for generations to come.

The State of Kuwait attaches special importance to human rights. The basic principles of Kuwaiti society are based on the pillars of justice, freedom, equality, cooperation, the rule of law, stable standards of living and the provision of guarantees for all human rights. Those guarantees are enshrined in the constitution of Kuwait. They are considered its salient characteristics. In promoting and protecting human rights, my country is guided by the words of God, as expressed in the glorious Koran, as well as by the many traditions of the prophet, Muhammed, which hold humankind in esteem as the inheritor of the earth and all its creatures. Humankind has inherited the earth with the instructions of Allah.

My country is marching in that direction, as expressed in the words of His Royal Highness the Emir of my country, who said that hope for illustrious human fraternity springs from merciful hearts believing in the dignity of humankind, whose rights they uphold as a torch that lights the way.

The Kuwaiti people are in the vanguard of those who are sensitive to the issue of human rights. We abide by them, advocate them and act according to their principles. The Kuwaiti people's Assembly, the parliament of Kuwait, has set up a permanent committee on human rights, which ensures respect by all for human rights in implementing the relevant Kuwaiti constitutional provisions.

The Kuwaiti people may have suffered more than others from the consequences of the violations of human rights and the flouting of their principles by some States. Since the Iraqi invasion of 1990, we have been suffering from a lack of real, genuine Iraqi cooperation in returning Kuwaiti prisoners of war, hostages and the nationals of other States or even in disclosing their whereabouts. Indeed, that is the primary humanitarian issue that Kuwait is currently dealing with. For their part, the Kuwaiti Government and people will never rest until Iraq discloses their whereabouts in accordance with universal principles and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We hope that this lofty occasion that we are celebrating today — the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — will motivate the Iraqi Government to cooperate faithfully and earnestly with the International Committee of the Red Cross to end the suffering of those innocent hostages and of their relatives and friends, as well as of the nationals of other countries.

God has honoured and favoured humankind over all His other creatures, as the object and the end of life and development. The rights of humankind, granted by God and safeguarded in divinely inspired legislation and positive laws, must henceforth be preserved.

In conclusion, we hope that the whole world will witness further respect for human rights in the future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In the wake of the horrors and atrocities committed in two World Wars, and as a reaction to them, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights embodied age-old wisdom dating back to the dawn of humankind, to the distant past in which our civilizations were born, to the Greek philosophers, to the great religions — Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist — and to the English philosophers and the French philosophers who spoke out to limit the all-powerful State in relation to the inalienable rights of the individual and protection of the citizen against the arbitrary will of the sovereign.

The Declaration, which incorporates the human rights provisions of the Charter, remains the most impressive and enlightened achievement of the United Nations. It can be stated with confidence that it enjoys moral and psychological authority without rival, with the possible exception of the Charter.

On 10 December 1948 the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first international document that defined and proclaimed human rights with universal validity and application, thus setting in motion a continuous process of far-reaching importance for all humankind. It proclaimed for the first time economic and social right, which, because of their importance, were placed on an equal footing with traditional civil and political rights. At that time this was regarded as revolutionary, and would in itself be enough to give the Declaration a prominent place in history. Since then, billions of people — men, women, elderly people and children — have resorted to this document for help and guidance.

Fifty years after its proclamation, the validity of that document is not in decline. It is a source of inspiration for many resolutions, treaties and international conventions, as well as a set of mechanisms for the protection and observance of specific human rights. The principal guidelines of these instruments are contained in the Declaration adopted in 1948.

Many countries have regarded the Declaration's provisions as legally binding and have thus incorporated them into their political constitutions and fundamental laws. The Proclamation of Tehran established the faith of the international community in the principles of the Declaration and urged all peoples to abide by those principles and to redouble their efforts to provide every citizen with a free and decent life allowing for, a state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action underscores that the Declaration is a goal for all peoples and nations. The Declaration is a source of inspiration and has provided the basis for the United Nations to establish the norms contained in international human rights instruments.

We are meeting today to commemorate this historic event, to look back with humility over 50 years and evaluate what has happened since then. It is an opportunity to engage in reflection, self-examination and self-criticism, to look not only at the positive aspects, but also at the difficulties and obstacles that had to be overcome, to use our experience in order to overcome the problems of the present and the future.

Colonialism and apartheid are but two of the problems that have been relegated to history in most of the countries on this planet. New challenges, however, call for creative and flexible approaches under the doctrine of human rights and the guiding light of the Universal Declaration. Some of the major challenges to the enjoyment of human rights are drug-trafficking, terrorism, racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, armed conflicts among minorities, discrimination against women, exploitation of children, xenophobia, lack of development and extreme poverty.

At the threshold of the new millennium, more than a billion human beings live in total destitution, and the desperation and frustration of their daily struggle often culminates in conflicts that shatter the bonds of social cohesion, leading to outbreaks of violence. Improving the human condition must be the goal of our endeavours and undertakings.

In Nicaragua we have had many problems as a result of lack of respect for human rights in the past. As a result, since 1948, we have suffered devastating civil wars. However, today we have overcome that situation. The President of Nicaragua, Mr. Arnoldo Alemán, in his address to the Assembly at this session, stated,

> "In commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reaffirm our commitment to continue to work with all the means at our disposal to promote and protect human rights. In Nicaragua we are moving ahead with the consolidation of peace and democracy based on full respect for human rights, establishment of the rule of law, respect for the separation of powers and the guarantee of individual

> liberties. At the same time, we have taken important steps in order to reach higher levels of economic development with social equity." *(A/53/PV.12, p. 10)*

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Dabor (Sierra Leone): We are gathered here today to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My delegation is pleased to be part of this momentous occasion.

Indeed, a lot has been achieved since the birth of the Declaration in 1948. We have seen, *inter alia*, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, most importantly, the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is common knowledge that this document has achieved universal recognition beyond what its architects contemplated. Human rights have been enshrined in the constitutions of almost every country of the world.

However, although much has been achieved, much still remains to be done because gross violations of human rights are still taking place in the world today.

My Government is committed to the protection and enhancement of human rights for all its citizens. Our Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech, movement, assembly, life, press and the maintenance of the rule of law. The due process of law is also strictly observed. This has been adequately demonstrated in the conduct of the current treason trials, which have been acclaimed by international observers to be transparent and fair.

Since 1991, a gruelling war has been going on in my country, and we have seen the most horrible violations of the rights of innocent civilians by the rebels. The country has witnessed the amputation of the arms and limbs of innocent civilians and the rape of women for no other reason than their support for democracy. It is the fundamental right of the citizens of every country to elect and support a Government of their choice. The international community must not allow this right to be thwarted by the violence of a group of rebels who do not believe in democracy.

Against this background, we would like to appeal to the international community to step up its assistance to the Government and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group to bring to an end the continued gross violation of human rights committed by the remaining rebels of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the Revolutionary United Front.

Although much has been achieved in the area of civil and political rights, we believe that much still remains to be done to enhance economic and social rights in the world. The gap between the rich and the poor needs to be closed. The onerous conditionalities imposed on poor countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should be re-examined because very often they have led to internal conflicts. The right to education, health and a decent standard of living are no less important than the right to freedom of expression.

The adoption of the Statute of the permanent International Criminal Court in July this year in Rome is one of the greatest achievements in the development of international humanitarian law. No longer will the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and genocide go scot-free. They will be brought to justice before this Court.

My Government has signed the Rome Statute because we believe it will contribute immensely to deterring the violation of human rights. I call upon all countries which have not signed the Rome Statute to do so as quickly as possible and to proceed with its ratification.

In conclusion, I wish to restate that my Government will continue to strive to uphold the ideals enshrined in the Declaration whose fiftieth anniversary we are assembled here to commemorate.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The peoples of the world are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What makes this event all the more significant is that it coincides with the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action with a view to enhancing and protecting human rights in a way that makes us feel that mankind, on the threshold of the third millennium, has come very close to realizing its aspirations to live in an environment in which the dignity and the future of individuals are secure and the advancement of the social progress of all peoples is achieved without discrimination, in accordance with the principles and provisions of human rights instruments and the Charter of the United Nations. But a brief glance around us shows that the aspirations we dreamed of as we voiced the principles and lofty ideals of human rights were mere illusions; this cannot but increase the frustration that has been growing daily. We live in a world divided into a rich North and a poor South. More than 80 per cent of the world's natural resources are controlled and consumed by only 20 per cent of humanity. Due to this division, which is the result of exploitation and selfishness, millions of people die of starvation and malnutrition, and the gap is still widening.

It is in this environment, in which the minority cannot increase their wealth without all others becoming poorer, that we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In fact, no divine religion, wisdom or set of human values can accept a tragic environment of this kind that deprives some four fifths of humanity of a life in human conditions. When the one fifth of humanity which so selfishly controls the resources speaks about human rights, the other four fifths are horrified at their hypocrisy. The strongest and the richest have the freedom to devour the poorest and the weakest. In the relationship between the strong and the weak, freedom is one thing that is suppressed. In such an economic, political and cultural environment, which is based on the hegemony of the strong over the weak, the overwhelming majority is suffering now as a result of the premeditated judgement and limited vision formulated by the strong and imposed on the others. That vision is centred around the wealthy minority as the sole actor in today's material civilization; it views other civilizations as static civilizations that have exhausted their capacity for progress and renaissance. All of this is contrary to the facts of life and history.

While the international community has made strenuous and sincere efforts to establish rules and principles aimed at the achievement of human well-being and the establishment of safe societies enjoying welfare and stability and respecting human rights, we find that those rights are violated by selective and subjective practices aimed at imposing a single approach to the interpretation and implementation of these rights that would further selfish political objectives. Human rights have become a political weapon in the hands of some States, and a selective measure used in accordance with a double standard that favours the interests and purposes of those States. They have also become a means of blackmail and political pressure on certain other States.

All of this constitutes a violation of one of the most important principles on which the Charter of the United Nations is based: the principle of the equal rights and duties of States and nations. What arouses the concern of the developing countries in particular is the deliberate neglect of and indifference to fundamental rights that have been established by United Nations declarations as principles, such as the right to self-determination, respect for the sovereignty, independence and national and territorial integrity of States and the right to development.

Iraq has suffered acutely from this abnormal situation, which is illustrated by the imposition of the comprehensive embargo on Iraq in 1990. This is unprecedented in history. During the past eight years, this unjust embargo has stood as a flagrant violation of the collective and individual human rights of Iraqis. Since the imposition of the sanctions, more than a million innocent children have perished, in addition to another million children who have been infected with infectious diseases and diseases related to chronic malnutrition. Half a million citizens have died as a result of the prevalence of various diseases and the increase of cancer and of nervous disorders. The environmental sector has also experienced heavy destruction as a result of the unjust military aggression in 1991 when United States and British forces, without any moral deterrence, used internationally banned weapons such as depleted uranium shells — in quantities, according to many international reports and the confessions of United States and British officials, of hundreds of tons.

Adopting a punitive policy towards Iraq by insisting upon the prolongation of the embargo in spite of Iraq's fulfilment of all the commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions constitutes a crime of genocide which is punishable under international law in times of either war or peace.

The cornerstone of human rights is the ability of everyone, particularly the strong, to sincerely recognize that human beings are human beings, and that they are all of the highest worth and are entitled to live in justice and peace within their local and national societies and within the framework of the community of States and peoples, without any threat to life or plunder of their culture or civilization.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) (*interpretation from French*): It is difficult to say something that has not already been said in the course of this commemoration, but I shall say a few words about my own country, Afghanistan, and human rights. Afghanistan is an Islamic country. As Muslims, we believe in the divine word; as we read in the Koran, "We have honoured the children of Adam" (*XVII:70*).

It is in this spirit that the Afghan delegation participated in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights half a century ago, in 1948, in the General Assembly. Afghanistan has ratified most of the international instruments in the field of human rights. This half-century has been the source of many lessons for all of humankind and especially for the Afghan nation. Afghanistan has been suffering from a series of armed conflicts for the last 20 years. It is becoming increasingly clear in our world that war, foreign intervention and, above all, armed intervention are the most atrocious forms of human rights violations, beginning with the most fundamental human right, the right to life.

In a resolution adopted unanimously in the General Assembly yesterday morning, prior to beginning these statements in commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reaffirmed that we should ensure the effective exercise of the rights of women and of the girl child, which are an inalienable and indivisible part of all human rights and basic freedoms. In Afghanistan, the rights of women have been particularly violated for four years now, and women have been the victims of the most fundamental violations.

As the representative of a war-stricken country where men, women and children aspire to live in peace, I propose that, along with civil, political, economic and cultural rights, the international community should formulate provisions on the right of peoples and nations to peace as a human right.

Our experience in Afghanistan proves that warfare provides the principal setting for violations of human rights, especially warfare caused by foreign intervention. This illustrates the importance of the role of the United Nations in preventing war in the first place and in bringing it to an end if it should arise.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Varšo (Slovakia) (*interpretation from French*): I am very honoured to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Slovak Republic associated itself yesterday with the statement made by Austria on behalf of the European Union, and I would now like to make some brief remarks on behalf of my delegation.

The commemoration of an anniversary is always an opportunity to reflect on the fundamental issues involved. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 is no exception. We should reflect today on the origin of the idea of "codifying" humanity's fundamental rights and freedoms, to what extent that idea has been fulfilled to date and what its future will be.

It is a paradox of history that the elaboration of this magnanimous code of fundamental rights and freedoms for the members of the human family had to be based on humanity's tragic experiences, particularly those having to do with the atrocious crimes committed by human beings against other human beings during the Second World War. The Declaration necessarily reflects and implicitly embodies these ideas along with the aims its sets for itself. We must recall this from time to time so that future generations will know the *raison d'être* and the historical context of the emergence of this small bible of principles for the conduct of human beings among themselves.

Unfortunately, the current situation in this regard is not at all satisfactory. We are witnessing violations of human rights in most of the world and, what is more, often on a massive scale. Civil wars and general hatred among peoples, which occurs for various reasons that are often very difficult to understand, frequently have a direct impact first and foremost on innocent people. But it would be an exaggeration to say that the Declaration's pursuit of its objective is in fact being undermined, because this obviously does not hold true for many regions of our world. We must now ask ourselves what needs to be done to ensure that these fundamental rights and freedoms are not trampled.

Given that since the adoption of the Declaration in 1948 the legal basis for human rights has been expanded and consolidated and that States recognize these rights, we must find mechanisms to ensure that the legal instruments are genuinely applied throughout our world. The most important thing is for us to unreservedly endorse the idea that it is in our common interest to rigorously pursue and secure respect for human rights within the triangular framework that encompasses all actors concerned, namely, the individual, to whom those rights belong; the State, as guarantor in their appropriate and unequivocal application; and the international community, which takes responsibility when the domestic means of the State are not capable of ensuring their application.

We note with interest the growing role at the international level of the monitoring bodies created pursuant to international treaties in the area of human rights, particularly judicial bodies. In this regard, I wish to inform the Assembly that the Slovak Republic will shortly be signing the Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted at the Rome Conference in July 1997, as that signature has recently been approved by the Slovak Government.

In the Slovak Republic the question of genuine respect for human rights is a constant concern of our authorities. After the last elections in September, the new Government established the post of Deputy Prime Minister for human rights, and Parliament similarly created a committee specifically entrusted with human rights questions. The Slovak Government proclaimed in its programme statement,

> "Constant attention will be given to the human dimension in foreign policy. The Government will play an active role in strengthening the system of international standards in the field of human rights, including those relating to the rights of national minorities".

In conclusion, allow me to also inform the Assembly that on the occasion of this anniversary, the Slovak Government issued a statement that notes, among other things, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the fundamental international document that has had the greatest impact in the second half of the twentieth century on positive developments in the area of human rights and that those principles have been incorporated into the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The Government of the Slovak Republic is resolved to create an effective system for the protection of human rights in a framework of the rule of law.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 76th plenary meeting on 2 December 1998, I now call on the Observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*interpretation from French*): Many speakers before me have emphasized the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the "mother" of all human rights conventions and whose anniversary we are commemorating. However, they have also underlined how far we still have to go before this Declaration is fully respected. My statement will touch on several aspects of human rights to which Switzerland attaches special importance.

The recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is for us a source of pride. It guarantees a more effective implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this connection, we hope that the Commission on Human Rights will set up the necessary international monitoring machinery for its implementation throughout the world.

In the same context, we hope that the implementation of the Convention against torture might be enhanced by the adoption of an optional protocol, as proposed by Costa Rica and Switzerland. Let us not forget either that protection of the individual is particularly vulnerable in the situations of violence or internal conflict that characterize our era. It is urgent, therefore, to identify basic standards for humanity that reflect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and that would apply in all circumstances and to all protagonists, be they State, international or non-State actors.

Crucial importance should also be attached to the realization of the rights of women and children. Millions of women are sexually mutilated or do not have equal access to education, and millions of children are deprived of schooling and forcibly recruited into armed conflicts. These and other examples show how the right to development and the rights of individuals are interconnected.

My country's commitment to human rights is given concrete form by a variety of activities. Its symbol is the Palais Wilson in Geneva, the new home of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which Switzerland officially handed over to the United Nations last June.

In order to meet the growing need for well-trained personnel who are prepared to work in the field for international organizations, Switzerland has created for this purpose a body of experts, to be trained in Geneva in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The opening of borders and of markets has given economic protagonists a power whose scope is not always easy to grasp. It is important, therefore, to make these economic actors more aware of the rights of the individual and more responsible in this respect. Switzerland has begun a dialogue in this regard, which, we believe, must also take place multilaterally and within the framework of the international organizations concerned.

We consider that an internationally credible policy on the rights of the individual must allow for constructive criticism and its acceptance. This would strengthen dialogue, which helps us progress. That does not mean, however, that we can distance ourselves from the conclusions of the Vienna Conference. Human rights are universal and indivisible. Dialogue cannot lead to relative judgments on the most fundamental rights. There are different forms of cultural adaptation of universal rights, and their integration can take time. But the common basis for dialogue is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, as its name implies, is unique and universal.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 76th plenary meeting on 2 December 1998, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Mr. Martino (Holy See): In recognition of the importance that the Holy See attaches to this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I have the honour to convey to the General Assembly the personal message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, which I will personally present to Mr. Opertti.

(spoke in French)

> "I take particular pleasure, through this message, in associating myself with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations, the depositary of the one of the most precious and significant documents in the history of law.
>
> "I do so all the more willingly because in a solemn Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church did not hesitate to affirm that while sharing in the joys and hopes and sorrows and fears of the people of this age, it also asks that we overcome and eradicate, as contrary to God's intent, every type of discrimination with respect to the fundamental rights of the individual.
>
> "By proclaiming 'a given number of fundamental rights to which all members of the human family are entitled, the Declaration has contributed decisively to the development of international law, challenged national legislations and permitted millions of men and women to live in greater dignity.
>
> "However, to observe the world today is to realize that these fundamental rights — proclaimed, codified and celebrated though they are — are still the object of continuous and serious violations. This anniversary is therefore, for all of the States that abide by the 1948 text, an appeal for an examination of conscience.
>
> "Too often the tendency is for some to choose this or that right according to their own liking and to ignore the ones that go against their transient interests. Others do not hesitate to isolate particular rights and take them out of context in order to justify their actions, often confusing liberty with licence, or to secure advantages for themselves without regard for human solidarity. Such attitudes clearly imperil the organic structure of the Declaration, which harmonizes each right with other rights and with the other obligations and limits that are required by an equitable society.
>
> "Moreover, such attitudes sometimes lead to an exaggerated individualism that may compel the strongest to dominate the weak and thus undermine the bond solidly established by the text between liberty and social justice. Let us therefore avoid seeing this fundamental text with the passage of years become merely a monument to be admired, or, worse even, a document consigned to the archives.

"For this reason I wish to repeat here what I stated on the occasion of my first visit to the Headquarters of this Organization on 2 October 1979:

> 'If the truths and principles contained in this document were to be forgotten or ignored and were thus to lose the genuine self-evidence that so distinguished them at the time they were brought painfully to birth, then the noble purpose of the United Nations [the peaceful coexistence of peoples and nations] would be faced with the threat of new destruction.' *(A/34/PV.17, para. 21)*

You will thus not be surprised if the Holy See gladly associates itself with the statement of the Secretary-General, who recently said that this anniversary provides the opportunity to ask not only how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can protect our rights, but how we can rightly protect the Declaration.

"The struggle for human rights is, therefore, a challenge to be met, and it requires perseverance and creativity from all of us. If, for example, the text of 1948 managed to limit the rigid concept of State sovereignty by which Governments were not held accountable for how they treated their citizens, no one can deny that new forms of sovereignty have since appeared. Today there are numerous international actors, individuals and organizations, who in reality enjoy a sovereignty comparable to that of a State and who decisively influence the destiny of millions of men and women. Thus it is important to find the appropriate ways to make sure that these actors also apply the principles of the Declaration.

"Moreover, 50 years ago the post-war political context did not allow the authors of the Declaration to endow it with an anthropological basis and explicit moral references, but they were very well aware that the principles proclaimed in the Declaration would be very soon devalued if the international community did not seek to anchor them in the various national cultural and religious traditions. It may be the task now ahead of us to faithfully maintain the unity of the authors' vision and to promote a legitimate pluralism in the exercise of the liberties proclaimed by the Declaration, while at the same time ensuring the universality and the indivisibility of the rights embodied in it.

"The challenge to be met is to promote the 'common standard' to which the Preamble of the Declaration refers and to allow it to become increasingly the ultimate reference in which human liberty and solidarity among persons and cultures meet and mutually enrich one another. This is why questioning the universality or even the existence of some of the fundamental principles would result in undermining the whole structure of human rights.

"At the end of this year, 1998, we see around us too many of our brothers and sisters overwhelmed by natural calamities, decimated by sickness, prostrated by ignorance and poverty, or victimized by cruel and endless wars. Alongside them, others more affluent seem to be sheltered from instability and to enjoy, at times ostentatiously, the necessities of life as well as many excesses. What has become of the right stated in article 28:

> 'Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.'

Dignity, freedom and happiness will never be complete without solidarity. This is very much the lesson of the tormented history of these last 50 years.

"Therefore let us embrace this precious heritage and, above all, make it bear fruit for the happiness of all and for the honour of each of us!

"I fervently pray for the development of fraternity and harmony between the peoples that the United Nations represents, and I invoke the abundance of God's blessings for all."

This is signed by Pope John Paul II.

The Acting President: The Chair has been informed that Mr. Juan Adolfo Singer, President of the Latin American Parliament, has encountered some travel difficulties and will not be making a statement. Copies of Mr. Singer's written text, however, will be available at the back of the conference room.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Linati-Bosch (Sovereign Military Order of Malta) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour of addressing the General Assembly on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a subject of international law that has celebrated nine centuries of existence and thus may be considered the oldest entity of a humanitarian nature that has survived to the present day.

The presence of the Order of Malta in more than 100 countries, the efforts of its volunteer corps and its work — which was highlighted during the recent emergencies in the Caribbean — give proof of its service to mankind. The diplomatic relations that it maintains with 82 Member States of the United Nations guarantee its independent functioning, which is confirmed by its presence at the United Nations and at the most important and relevant international organizations. The agreement recently reached with the Republic of Malta concerning the use of Fort Sant'Anglu in Birgu provides a recent example of its presence in the field of public law. From its extraterritorial seat in Rome, the Order exercises its sovereign functions.

All this justifies the importance that the Order gives to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to its effective application. Without doubt the Declaration represents the highest point ever achieved in the pursuit of a more equitable world. All the specific items needed for guaranteeing and recognizing human rights are included in the Declaration of 10 December 1948. Let us remember that the opposition to discrimination for reasons of race, sex or religion, the freedom and security of individuals, the right to life, the abolition of slavery, equality before the law, freedom of residence, and the rights of families and to property that are included in the Declaration text are milestones in humanity's long journey to the present day.

At the same time, however, we must be mindful of the fact that these objectives have not yet been fully achieved. More than 800 million people live in conditions of abject poverty or suffer hunger. Drugs, terrorism, prostitution, racism, armed conflicts and ignorance are among the other scourges that beset an incredible number of human beings.

If we accept that each right is linked to a duty, I can say that the Sovereign Order of Malta understands its duties. In accordance with our tradition, we must declare that human rights come directly from God. Over the centuries human consciences have only slowly become aware of this idea. The last 50 years have marked an important advance, a great part of the credit for which is due to the United Nations and its agencies.

No one can shrink from his contribution to the cause of humanity. From the right to be born to the right to a dignified death, human life follows a path that must be protected. Today this is still not the case.

When human rights are under attack, their protection is the responsibility of every State, within the limits of its own sovereignty. But the international community must also be mindful of its own responsibility. For this reason, the Sovereign Order of Malta has to do its utmost to support the work of the United Nations when the Organization takes upon itself the heavy burden of converting the letter of the Declaration into reality.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for the commemorative occasion.

I now declare concluded the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 46?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded consideration of agenda item 46 as a whole.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.